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COMPANION CHARACTERS:

A SERIES OF STUDIES

IN

BIBLE BIOGRAPHY.

"He began to send them forth by two and two."—Mark.

BY

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TO THE MEMBERS

OF THE

CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CINCINNATI, O.,

FOR WHOM ALMOST ALL THESE DISCOURSES WERE FIRST PREPARED,

AND AMONG WHOM IT WAS MY JOY TO MINISTER FOR MANY YEARS,

THIS VOLUME

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED,

IN TENDER MEMORY OF THE DEAD, AND WITH UNABATED LOVE FOR THE LIVING.

PROPERTY OF
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PREFACE.

THIS volume owes its existence to the author's belief that there was yet an unoccupied field in Scripture Biography, the character of which is sufficiently defined in the title. The inspired writers so frequently portray human characters in pairs, that this feature of the general subject has seemed worthy of all the emphasis laid upon it in this series of studies. It will be seen that these lectures were originally written for the pulpit; and this fact will account for the general structure of the discourses, and the treatment of the various topics. Four-fifths of the characters here studied are from the Old Testament; while of this larger portion one-half are from the books of Moses. It is the writer's hope and belief that this fact will not, even in this day of destructive criticism, make their examination any less interesting or instructive to the great majority of readers.

These lectures were first written during the busiest period of a busy pastorate. After ten years they have been entirely re-written and prepared for the press during a season of providential retirement and comparative

leisure, while awaiting, in beautiful Santa Barbara, the returning health of a beloved invalid.

In the hope that what is here written may help, guide, and comfort the reader, the writer commends his book to the Divine favor. If it shall be found honoring God, and edifying His people, it will have accomplished the highest ambition of

THE AUTHOR.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL., *April*, 1883.

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COMPANION CHARACTERS.

I.

CAIN AND ABEL.

THESE two familiar names stand at the beginning of two great lines of human character and conduct—the godly and the ungodly, the righteous and the wicked. They may be taken as the representative characters of all, in every age, who serve God, and of those who serve Him not. The two diverse yet parallel generations speedily take on the prominent features by which they have been distinguished throughout all time. It is a notable characteristic of the one line, that, even in the beginning, they "began to call upon the name of the Lord," or, as the margin reads, "call themselves by the name of Jehovah." Either reading leads us to the same judgment respecting the character of this part of the human family. They were a praying people. They lived on the earth, and among their fellow-men; but they maintained communion with God, their Creator and Father, in the exercises of worship. They belonged to "the true Israel" long before there was any "Israel according to the flesh."

The other line were essentially worldly in their character and aims. They had too much to do with temporal

things to care a great deal for the unseen and the spiritual. It is worthy of thoughtful attention that the brief record which notes the one fact of the children of Seth, that they worshiped Jehovah, mentions these things of the descendants of Cain—that they built cities, and invented many of the mechanic arts, while they also cultivated the fine-arts and the habits of a luxurious and sensual life. It is not meant, of course, that all the Sethites were the servants of God, or that all the Cainites were irreligious, and much less that true religion then, any more than it is now, was opposed to the cultivation of æsthetic tastes. The fact is simply noted that, to the line of Adam's children, the prevailing characteristic of which was ungodliness, we are indebted for these things, which belong emphatically to "this present world." Among them we find the first architects and artificers in brass and iron. Among them were the first poets, musicians, and warriors. And the fact that they were already effeminate and voluptuous, is rendered probable by the suggestive names which are to be met with in their genealogies.

We know of but three women, besides the "mother of us all," who lived before the flood. These were Adah, Zillah, and Naamah. Now, when we remember that all names were significant of something in those early times, we can find out something perhaps, though it may be only a hint, of the character of the people from the names by which they were known. These three names, says a recent writer,* "indicate that the

* Rev. Samuel Cox, in *The Sunday Magazine*, 1869, p. 158.

original and noble conception of woman, as the help-meet of the man, was being rapidly superseded by that voluptuous and degrading view which has ever since prevailed in the East. For each of these names emphasizes that which is merely superficial and sensuous, that which kindles desire. Adah is 'the beautiful one' or 'the ornament'; Zillah means 'shadow,' and embodies an allusion to that shade from the fierce heat, which is so welcome to those who have to abide the smitings of an oriental sun; and Naamah is the 'sweet, or lovely one'; they are pleasant toys, and little more. The pure and noble ideal of the true woman, the true wife, must have been very remote from the thought of those who bestowed such names upon their women."

Whatever value we may attach to the inference of this writer from such names, it is certain that not a little can be learned of the hopes and disappointments of our first parents from the names of their immediate children. For example, there seems to be no doubt that Eve regarded her first-born as the promised Messiah, "the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head," and so she called him "Cain," saying, in the extravagance of her expectation, "I have gotten a man—Jehovah." Her disappointment was very great. Many Jewish mothers, looking for Messiah before His time, were probably disappointed in like manner. Through the entire history we meet with names that would seem to have been given by fond parents in the hope that some one of those who bore them might prove to be the "King in Zion." But, alas! too often Messiah proved a murderer, as in the beginning. Eve soon discovered

her mistake, and her disappointment comes out in the name of her second son. She called him "Abel," which signifies "a vanishing vapor." The pendulum of her spirits had swung to the other extreme. One more vibration, and it shall come to rest. Unduly elated at first, and then unduly depressed, in her third son she comes to a sober expectation, and calls him "Seth," which means "established."

It is in Cain and Abel,—"the man Jehovah," and "the vanishing vapor," as their mother called them,—that we are just now specially interested. The record of their lives is very brief, but very suggestive. One scene only in these lives is dwelt upon by the inspired penman. But one may see a great deal in a single picture; and this one is full of striking lights and shadows. A careful examination of it will throw a vast deal of light upon the characters of these two earliest children of men. One of the most important things revealed in such an examination is—

I.—The Contrast between True and False Worship.

Cain was a tiller of the ground, and Abel was a keeper of sheep. "In process of time," literally, "At the end of days,"—at the end of the year perhaps, or more probably at the end of seven days, on the weekly Sabbath, the two brothers came before God to worship. Where they worshiped we are not told. It is a probable supposition, but only a supposition, that man's first altar was before "the cherubim and flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life," as God had appointed. It would seem as if this were the most

fitting place for the worship of fallen man, returning to God, and craving, as he has always done, some visible token of the Divine Presence. This was probably emphatically that "presence of the Lord," from which afterward Cain went out into the land of banishment.

Into this sacred presence the worshiping brothers brought their offerings. Cain brought of the fruits of the ground, and Abel of the firstlings of his flock. The offering of the latter was accepted—how we are not informed. We know that afterward the Divine acceptance was signified by the descent of fire from God to consume the sacrifice. This was notably the case with the offerings at the consecration of Aaron as the high-priest of Israel,—"And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces." Thus, also, was Gideon's sacrifice accepted, when "there rose up fire out of the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes." So, too, in the solemn dedication of the temple, the Divine favor was vouchsafed in the same way;—"When Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house." It was no uncommon thing, therefore, for God to signify His acceptance of the offerings of His people by the descent of fire. And if the conjecture be well founded that the place of worship was before the flaming cherubim, it is not unlikely that God's approval here was manifested in a similar way. The fire of God consumed the bloody offering of Abel,

but left untouched the fruits of the ground which Cain had brought to the altar. How like this primitive scene is that notable one three thousand years adown the history, when on Mt. Carmel the heavenly fire descended upon the lone prophet's sacrifice, while the offering of Baal's servants remained still unconsumed, amidst their agonizing cries for help from their so-called "god of fire."

In whatever way it was done, the fact stands forth upon this primitive record that one offering was rejected, while the other was received. Why was Abel's sacrifice accepted, and not Cain's? In the proper answer to this question lies the very marrow and essence of the Gospel of the grace of God. Both offerings had that one element of true worship, which, though coupled with a promise, many of us are prone to overlook—the "honoring of the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase, that so our barns may be filled with plenty, and our presses burst forth with new wine." But still one was accepted, and the other was rejected, by the righteous Judge of all the earth, who always does right. There must have been, then, a difference between the worshipers, or their offerings. Which was it? The only sufficient answer is, Both. Their offerings differed because they differed.

The Apostle says (Heb. xi. 4), "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." Plainly, then, the brothers differed in spirit. Cain had no faith, while Abel had. But faith in what? Cain evidently possessed some sort of faith. He

clearly believed in the existence of God. Just as plainly he believed in the reasonableness of Divine worship. And it is just as clear that Abel's faith, including these features, must have comprehended more. What more? And how much more?

We must bear in mind that God had already revealed the promise of deliverance from the power of sin and death through a Saviour. There is good ground for believing that He had also given some information as to the method of that deliverance in the atoning death, by the institution of animal sacrifices. The Divine origin of sacrifices, it is true, is questioned by some learned men. But it would seem difficult for one, who accepts the Christian revelation, to believe that a rite, so significant and so mysterious, could have originated in any other way than by God's appointment. Animal food was not permitted until after the flood; and yet, by Divine arrangement, the fallen pair were clothed with animal skins. In the light of the subsequent history, it seems all but certain that these were taken from their sacrifices.

Then if we contrast the offerings of these two brothers, it has been well said,* "In themselves, rationally and æsthetically, Cain's was the more beautiful offering —productions of the ground, flowers, and fruits: a simple, sweet, beautiful expression of thankfulness and worship to the Producer of life. On the other hand, the offering made by Abel was contradictory of all *à priori*

* Dr. C. F. Deems in *The Homiletical Monthly*, November, 1881 p. 87.

reasoning on what would be acceptable to God. That the God of all goodness, who maintained in life and propagated a race that had rebelled against Him, had surrounded them with so many things of beauty and of comfort, and had continued intercourse with them, instructing them in the ways of religion and in the methods of moral development — that this God would be pleased by the taking of a simple little lamb from out the folds and cutting its throat, and shedding its blood, would not enter into the mind of any rational man, not to say any good man."

Still further, if we look a little more closely into the record of these contrasted offerings, we shall find some light thrown upon the character of Abel's sacrifice. This will be even more clear if we compare the language here used with that of the ceremonial law, long afterward established by Divine appointment among the Jewish people. Abel, we are told, brought of the firstlings of his flock, "and of the fat thereof." This last additional expression is a very suggestive one under the circumstances. Let us compare this with the language of the law, as subsequently given to Israel. God says, by the mouth of Moses, "And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire, for a sweet savor. All the fat is the Lord's. It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations, throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood." This language is just as peculiar as the words of the earlier record of these contrasted offerings. And this special reservation of the "fat," as "the food of the offering," is in the law connected with other distinctive ceremo-

nies—such as the confession of sin with hands upon the head of the victim, and the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice upon the altar and the worshiper. And the whole service pointed forward to the blood-shedding of Calvary. If, now, as is commonly supposed, the Lawgiver of Israel be the author of Genesis, his use of this peculiar expression seems to intimate that the younger brother came into the Divine presence, with humble confession of sin, and faith in the blood of atonement.

And it was pre-eminently Abel's faith in this revelation of a coming Saviour, that made him to differ from Cain. The offerings differed, not, as at first thought we might suppose, because their occupations differed, but because they differed. The one came penitent and believing. Faith is a belief in the Divine testimony. Such was Abel's. His was evidently faith in a Saviour to come, typified by his animal sacrifice, the blood pointing to the great atonement, and the covering of skin to the perfect robe of righteousness.

The other came in his self-righteousness. Cain was the forerunner and representative of those who, feeling no need of pardon, never plead the atoning blood; and, resting in mistaken notions of the Divine goodness, make all worship to consist in the acknowledgment of the bounties of God's providence. And so he was rejected. We shall yet see that the truth underlying this rejection has an important bearing upon ourselves, in all our approaches to God. For the present, we turn to another part of the scene, and consider

II.—The Divine Remonstrance.

The rejected worshiper was dissatisfied with the result of this day's approach to God. And God mercifully condescends to reason with him about it. "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." The words which describe the effect on Cain's mind of his rejection, are very forcible. They imply that he was bitterly angry, and chagrined and mortified beyond measure, full of hatred of God, as well as of envy of his brother Abel. It was probably the first rejection of offered worship; and the surprise of it only intensified Cain's every evil passion. So God remonstrates with him, in all tenderness and fidelity, showing him that he was himself in the wrong, and had only himself to blame for his rejected and unconsumed offering.

A little further examination of the narrative will bring out an unlooked-for plainness, and even severity, in this remonstrance. Cain was a self-righteous worshiper. He came before God with no sense of sin. He did not feel that he had any need of any expiation. He stood upon his own merits. And God dealt with him accordingly. The first part of this remonstrance seems to address him in this way, viz.: 'You look for Divine acceptance upon the ground of your doing. That is all right. Do well, and you shall be accepted.' We recognize the resemblance of this interview, up to this point, to that of Christ with the young ruler. The young man came saying, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And the Lord answered him, as God here answered Cain,

'You seek life and favor by doing. Do, and live: You know the commandments; keep them, and you shall find favor.' We shall make a great mistake, however, if we suppose that either interview countenances the idea that salvation is possible to a fallen man in this way of doing. In both cases, God places this way before self-righteous men, that, by a complete trial and an absolute and positive failure, they may come to rest in the righteousness of another, and be satisfied to be saved in the way of God's gracious appointment.

But, in Cain's case, the remonstrance now takes on a severer aspect. "And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

There are two interpretations of this passage. According to one, the term "sin" means a "sin-offering"—analogous to that passage in which the Apostle says Christ's second coming shall be "without sin," *i. e.*, "a sin-offering," as many scholars think it should be read. Then the remonstrance amounts to this, viz.: 'You look for acceptance by doing. All right. Do well, and you shall have it. But if you do not well—if you sin—there is but one way of safety open to you. A sin-offering is just at hand—at your door. Come with it, a penitent and believing sinner, trusting in the atoning blood; and you also shall be accepted. So coming, you shall be restored to your rightful place as the elder brother; and unto you shall be your brother's desire, and you shall rule over him.'

The other interpretation turns largely upon the exact meaning of the expression, "Sin lieth at the door."

Cain was a self-willed and arrogant man. And now he is filled with a sullen and vindictive spirit. A plain and solemn warning, against the impending crisis in his relations to his brother, is loudly demanded; and God gives it. Seeking to impress the morose man, now under the dominance of wrathful feelings, with the deadly proximity, and cruel and crafty nature of the danger before him, He likens sin to some wild beast, that, with swaying tail and flashing eyes, crouches in his path, ready to spring and devour him with another step. So He says, as some scholars read the words, "If thou doest not well," beware! "sin is a croucher at the door, and against thee is his desire" (the croucher's desire), "and thou shouldst rule over him." The intensely vivid character of the admonition is apparent. We may well suppose it would have startled the guilty man, if anything could have aroused him to a sense of his danger.

The question now comes up, What does the last clause mean? Is it an exhortation, or a prediction? Does it signify, 'You should overcome it,' or, 'Thou shalt become an adept in it, making use of it as a master uses his slave—as a wicked man uses his knowledge of wicked arts'? It is impossible for us to answer these questions. And an answer is immaterial. The warning is a solemn one in either case. If we take it as an exhortation, then a faithful God points Cain to the crouching, blood-thirsty animal, waiting outside; and urges him to gird himself to overcome and slay the monster. If we take it as a prediction, then Jehovah, still a faithful God, paints the proud sinner's direful doom, as, stepping to the door, he mounts the waiting demon, and drives him headlong

into the overwhelming gulf of woe; while ever there sounds in his heedless ears the warning Divine,—Beware! BEWARE! The warning was unheeded. Deaf alike to the proffer of life, by a gracious way, and to a warning almost terrible in its vividness and faithfulness, the guilty man left the Divine presence, bending to his downward way. Soon the first dreadful murder is committed, and the voice of Abel's blood cries out to God against his cruel brother.

One other topic is furnished by this primitive tragedy.

III.—The Arraignment and Sentence of Cain.

Once more Jehovah comes to speak with the guilty man. But He comes no more with tender and faithful remonstrance. The day of opportunity is gone. The terrible progress of evil has met with no arrest. Self-righteousness, pride, displeasure, envy, jealousy, anger, hardness of heart, stiffness of neck, rage, and murder,—these are the awful steps by which the first-born son of Adam climbs down the way of sin and shame. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

And now the omniscient God comes forth to make inquisition for blood. Jehovah sits now upon the judgment-seat; and the criminal is arraigned for sentence. How startling and significant the few brief words that open this judicial quest,—"Where is Abel, thy brother?" How much they imply as to the conduct of the guilty man! Who can tell the drift of that last conversation between the brothers in the field? Only this we know: it ended in hot words on the part of the elder, and then in the deadly blow. The direful deed was soon done.

And then the murderer fled. Even he could not abide in the presence of the dead. The first lifeless form in human mould his eyes had ever looked upon, we do not wonder the sight was more than he could bear, and that he sought to put the awful spectacle away alike from sight and memory. Ah! how unwelcome and terrible the question, "Where is thy brother?" He knew where he had left him. He remembered how he had left him. His eyes could even now reproduce with painful vividness that horrible sight—the last so indelibly burned in upon his averted vision—the cold stiff body of his own mother's son, his younger brother, brought low by his own murderous hand, and now lying stretched in saddest loneliness upon the silent field. He was not with Abel, when God found him. "Where is thy brother?"

The murderer's reply is painfully suggestive. For one thing, it reveals the spirit of the man. We can not fail to notice the brutality of Cain's nature, in contrast with the shame and anguish of our first parents, in their fall. They had sinned, and were conscious of the fact. They, too, had fled from the face and voice of God. But, when confronted by their Creator, they are overwhelmed with a sense of shame. They seek to palliate and excuse their offence, which yet they acknowledge. They bow to the dreadful penalty imposed by the Infinite Judge. And their hearts, not yet obdurately set upon their evil ways, turn with amazing promptness to seize upon the high and blessed hope of life in the Divine promise. We find no such spirit in their eldest son. There is here no flying from God, no sense of shame,

and no shifting of responsibility. On the contrary, we have from Cain a shameless lie, and a bold and blasphemous denial of all responsibility for his brother's state. "I know not: am I my brother's keeper?"

There was a measure of truth in Cain's statement. He did not know that his dead brother was yet lying where he had left him. And, of course, he could not always have his brother under his eye, or in his charge, if he were still alive. How like the course of men in every age! The lie is a sin that enters into all sins. But from the lie, naked and bare, men shrink. Unhesitatingly they palter with the truth, and speak the lie mingled with the truth, that so they may deceive themselves, and be able to say,—"We are not polluted." Thus it was with Cain. Though a bloody murderer, he dare not face the lie; and he tampers with the truth even in her most holy sanctuary. But Cain stood now before a tribunal, where all such subterfuges availed him nothing.

God did not ask for His own information,—"What hast thou done?" Self-confessed, with all the cloaking of his sin, the criminal is at the bar a guilty man. Slowly and solemnly the awful sentence now comes forth from the lips of the righteous Judge. "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand: when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

So "Cain went out from the presence of the LORD."

Now, for the first time, the doomed man seemed to realize the destiny before him; and he lifted up his voice, like Esau in a later age, in unavailing lamentation,—"My punishment is greater than I can bear." But does not God often punish sin after this manner? The very ground was outraged by Cain's sin. It was in the field that the crime was committed. The lifeless body was lying yonder on the ground. The ground itself had absorbed that brother's blood. And now from the bosom of the earth that crimson, tongueless tide had found a voice with which to cry to God. And it was fitting, then, that the *ground* should be the instrument of the curse. It will not yield its strength to the bloody hand. So, in our time, does God punish. Men sin with their bodies; and their bodies curse them. Men transgress with their money; and their money torments them. Men poison their minds; and their minds poison their lives. Men trample on society; and society turns and rends them. The ground cursed by the murderer's hand brings a curse to the murderer's heart.

It is useless to speculate concerning the mark by which Cain was protected. It rendered him safe from destruction by his fellow-men. But he was none the less a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth. It seems, indeed, probable that he was a wanderer, more in the ceaseless restlessness of a tormented mind, than in actual and bodily roving; for he, first of all men, built a city, and acquired a stable dwelling-place in the land of exile. His case is the first of a vast multitude of illustrations of the fact that the nomad may be at rest, while the citizen is an endless wanderer. True sta-

bility and peace depend, not on what we have without, but what there is within. Most sadly significant, throughout this whole scene, is the fact that there is manifested, by Cain, no penitence and no faith, but only sullen and gloomy despair. As in the case of the traitor Judas, there is here the profoundest grief over the consequences of transgression; but no real sorrow for sin, or turning away from it to seek the Lord, whom he had so grievously offended. It is of the utmost importance for us to remember this fact. The story is wonderful for its brevity and suggestiveness. It touches all our hearts, and fastens firmly upon our memories. Multitudes are touched by the pathetic lamentation of the elder brother, as he mourns his grievous punishment; and unconsciously they sympathize with him, forgetting the younger brother's untimely end, so cruelly accomplished by the hand of violence. They forget, too, the loving expostulation of Jehovah, and the faithful warning, by which He sought to turn him from his guilty purpose. The God who punishes, is the God who warns and entreats. His voice to us is His voice to His people of old,—"Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel."

Such were Cain and Abel. And such was the righteous manner in which God treated them. In the one scene of their lives, portrayed in the Holy Scriptures, we see how they worshiped; and how Jehovah looked upon their offerings. Our view of the subject would not be complete, if we failed to note some of the important practical lessons which it emphasizes for our instruction. Let us learn—

1. That there is no access to God but by expiation. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission." No truth is more uniformly taught, in God's Word, than this, that sin must be atoned for, or it must be punished. This is the solemn lesson of man's first worship at the gates of Eden. Again and again, the lesson is repeated on every smoking altar in patriarchal times. We read the same story in scarlet letters throughout the whole ceremonial worship in Israel. On the forefront of Tabernacle and Temple a Divine hand wrote the sacred legend, —"There is life only in the blood." And this is the grand lesson of Calvary. The song of salvation is a song of blood. Paul strikes the key-note, when he says, —"We have redemption through His blood"; and the song rises through all the stages of Christian experience, —"Justified by faith in the blood," and "Cleansed from all sin by the blood," and "Having peace through the blood," and "Being made nigh by the blood," we "Enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus"—until, far off on yonder hills of heaven, the highest strains resound from the ransomed host, who "Overcame by the blood of the Lamb," and who have "Washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," as they sing,—"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

This is emphatically and distinctively the Christian religion. And it has been well said,—"The tendency of the world's religion just now is, to reject the blood; and to glory in a gospel which needs no sacrifice, no 'Lamb slain.' Thus they go 'in the way of Cain' (Jude

2.) Cain refused the blood, and came to God without it. He would not own himself a sinner, condemned to die, and needing the death of another to save him. This was man's open rejection of God's own way of life. Foremost in this rejection of, what is profanely called by some scoffers, 'the religion of the shambles,' we see the first murderer; and he, who would not defile his altar with the blood of a lamb, pollutes the earth with his brother's blood."*

2. The insidious growth and awful power of sin. We have already marked some of the steps by which Cain went on his downward way. The solemn fact that there were steps in his fall deserves our thoughtful reflection. The process was rapid; but there was a process. Sin grows. Insidiously but certainly it increases with defiling and damning power. Sin tends to develop sin. "Like all other forms of character, sin grows. Never for an hour is it at a standstill. No soul can live in eternal infancy. One sin begets another sin. Nothing else in nature is so prolific. One sin roots itself in the soil of character, and spreads itself outward, and lifts itself heavenward defiantly. Sin penetrates the underground of character, and forms there hidden enormities and unconscious depths of passion."†

It was so with Cain. He did not become a murderer all at once. He began with a course of conduct, that seemed to deny that he was a sinner at all. He ended in a deed that stamped him as a sinner of the deepest

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* Dr. Horace Bonar's "God's Way of Peace," p. 60.

† Dr. Austin Phelps' "Studies of the Old Testament," p. 139.

dye. All that lies between these two extremes, illustrates, not only the growth, but also the power of transgression. Sin is a deceitful and treacherous beast. At first it courts control. It is but a little thing. It can be so easily managed. It is so submissive to the human will. How easy to master it, and to use it for our own advantage and happiness! And so we are persuaded to mount the crafty animal, only to find out that, when once on, it is almost impossible to get off. The once tractable steed, too, is now no longer so. Its evil and imperious nature begins now to reveal itself. It will carry us, but it will carry us whither we would not. We were masters, but now we are slaves; and he who rules us, rules us with a rod of iron. He rules us none the less, that he rules by serving us—serving our lusts and pleasures. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." And the slave of sin is the veriest slave of all slaves; for sin is the tyrant of all tyrants. Let us beware of "the croucher at the door."

3. The only true immortality. Abel was Eve's "vanishing vapor." His life, we are ready to say, answered to his name. So soon cut off, what a failure of life's great end and purpose! But was it so? How long shall we be learning that life does not consist in length of days? Abel was dead; but four thousand years after his days the pen of inspiration says, "He, being dead, yet speaketh." The lesson of his faith was not then lost to the world. Nor is it yet. His spirit, worship, and example are still a living power in the earth. Men do not need to live long, in order to live well. A long life is not necessary to a commanding influence. Multitudes

of men are dead, long before their fellow-men bury them. The living men of this and other generations have long since been laid to rest in the sepulchres of their fathers. Abel's case was the first, and one of the most conspicuous, but not last illustration of the words of our blessed Lord,—"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The death of Abel was necessary in order to his life. But for that death, we should have had only the grain of wheat, where now we enjoy the glorious golden harvest. Let us comfort ourselves in the early death of the believing and the good. They only truly live. Yonder on the heights of life to die no more, they live. But, more than this, they live here in the midst of the dying. The world counts them but a "vanishing vapor"; but in the sacred and precious influence of their example, they still live; and, as they could not, while they were alive, continue powerfully to mould and shape the characters and lives of the coming race. The vanishing vapor may leave a greener earth, while through its rifted side it opens the sunny heavens to the waiting vision.

II.

JACOB AND ESAU.

THE history of Jacob and Esau occupies about one-fifth part of the book of Genesis. It would be difficult as well as inexpedient, therefore, to attempt here even a summary of their respective lives. No epitome of the story could be so interesting to the casual reader, or so suggestive to a thoughtful mind, as the sacred narrative itself. We linger, with unfailing attention, over the few brief episodes in the lives of these twin brothers. The Divine preference of the younger to the elder, announced to the troubled mother, before the birth of the children, introduces us, thus early in the Inspired Volume, to the high and holy mysteries of the doctrine of election, so abundantly illustrated in subsequent portions of Holy Scripture. The selling of the birthright, and the theft of the paternal blessing, and the final and friendly meeting of the long estranged brothers—these are culminating scenes in no ordinary lives. They are full of light and shade. They are profoundly illustrative of character. And they furnish many practical lessons of present and potent value. Out of this mine of wealth, let us gather some of the ore, which, transmuted into the currency of our every-day life, may

prove of both immediate and lasting spiritual profit to us. The record of these contrasted lives throws light upon some prominent mistakes, into which multitudes in modern times are prone to fall. Such, for example, is—

I.—The Disposition to Meddle with the Divine Purposes.

The result, as in the case here illustrated, is uniformly unfortunate; and oftentimes it is disastrous. Of late years, this intermeddling has appeared uppermost in society, in the matter of the efficacy of prayer. As if it were some new and startling discovery, it is announced that prayer can not have any efficiency, because of the uniformity of nature's laws; or (to use the Scriptural synonym of this expression), by reason of the unchangeableness of the Divine purposes.

More commonly this interference with God's decrees, in the effort to ascertain the limits and obligations of human action, comes to light in the objections of unconverted people, when urged to seek the salvation of their souls. It takes this form,—'If God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, it is irrevocably decreed that I shall be saved or lost. I have, therefore, no power or efficiency in the matter. And, if it be God's purpose to save me, the time of my conversion is preappointed; and I can neither hasten nor hinder it. I must await God's time. In His pleasure, not mine, He will save me.'

The folly of all this is well illustrated in the story of Jacob and Esau. A significant instance of unwarranted meddling with the Divine purpose, is here furnished us

in the conduct of Jacob and his mother. Before her children were born, Rebecca had received an intimation from God, as to their respective destinies. The elder was to serve the younger. Jacob was chosen, Esau was rejected. The fact of that election was doubtless in time communicated by the partial mother to her favorite son. And, without waiting for God to effectuate His purpose in His own time and way, they immediately began their own plotting to make it an accomplished fact. So, while they were yet boys, Jacob wheedled his brother out of his birthright. And, when they had arrived at man's estate, he and his mother entered into a conspiracy to deceive his blind old father, and to cheat his brother out of the blessing. They did not wait for God to carry out His purpose. And they sinned. Ought not men, then, to wait for God to carry out His purpose in their conversion? We shall see. For the present, another line of thought claims our attention.

It is one of the notable, but sad instances of mistaken judgment, that even Christian writers are to be found, who do not scruple to defend the conduct of this mother and son. But, by every right standard of judgment, their actions were wholly indefensible. If Jacob was right in driving a hard bargain in his brother's necessities, and in buying all the inestimable blessings of the birthright in the covenant family for a dish of bean-soup; then all the rascalities of gambling, and every other transaction, in which men get gain for which they give no proper equivalent, are justifiable in like manner. And, if Rebecca's deceit, and Jacob's barefaced lying at the bedside of the blind old Isaac, be right; then it

may be safely said we have no further use for the ninth commandment.

This defense of such indefensible conduct is wholly unnecessary, and it brings discredit upon the Inspired Volume itself. These Bible portraits of character are not descriptions of perfect people. And, if they were, they might be good reading for the angels; but they would have no such special meaning for us and adaptation to our necessities as they now have. As a matter of fact, they have such an irresistible fascination for us, because we see these people are just like ourselves,—"men of like passions," "encompassed with infirmities," exposed to temptations, falling into sin, repenting, rising up, and on the whole getting better, and journeying heavenward.

It ought to be said, indeed, that this defense is entered upon, by some, to avoid another difficulty—that is, the fact that such conduct is not censured in the narrative itself; and, therefore (it is thought), it must be right. If it were wrong, would the inspired writer have omitted to record some condemnation of it? Certainly there is no such record. But we shall be vastly mistaken, if we suppose that this fact is conclusive of the Divine estimate of this kind of conduct. God does not, in our day, speak in open and immediate condemnation of wrong-doing. For the most part, He leaves the punishment of unatoned and unrepented sin for the world of retribution. At other times, He leaves the Nemesis of vengeance to follow the evolutions of His providence. It was so in the case now before us.

Rebecca and Jacob were not immediately censured.

And yet the history shows plainly that they were both severely punished; and punished, too, in such a way as to significantly connect the penalty with the sin.

For example, the mother's great sin—the spring of all the rest—was impatience of God's plan. She could not wait for God to fulfil His purpose in His own time and way; she must take matters into her own hands, to hurry them up. So Sarah did before her, in the substitution of Hagar, and was punished in the family dissensions which arose about Ishmael. Rebecca's punishment came in a life-long separation from her favorite son, and the vain waiting for his return. To escape the evils brought upon them by her own misconduct, she had said to Jacob,—"Arise, flee thou to Laban my brother, to Haran: and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away." Alas! her "few days" lengthened into twenty long years; and when Jacob came home, his mother was probably dead.

In like manner also, Jacob was punished. A deceiver, he was himself deceived, in almost every crisis of his life. He cheated Esau; and Laban cheated him. He deceived his father in beguiling from him the blessing; and his mother's brother deceived him by beguiling him into the misery of a double marriage. It was by the aid of Esau's garments that he deceived his father; it was by the aid of his own Joseph's garments that his sons long afterwards deceived him. It is hardly possible for us to doubt that these providential occurrences, so suggestively related, were intended by God as punishments, and punishments, too, for the particular sins which Rebecca and Jacob had committed.

God is still the God of providence; and His ordering of men's affairs is often such as to show that He has not forgotten their transgressions. This, indeed, is not the world of final settlement; and the Divine patience sometimes permits the account to remain an open one until the great day of eternal adjudication. But in many cases, He visits for iniquity even while men are yet in a world of mercy. Not unfrequently, it is within the circle of our knowledge and observation that the afflictions which men suffer, are believed, both by themselves and their neighbors, to be judgments from God upon them for their transgressions. And, were it not that we shrink from those uncharitable judgments, which the Scriptures condemn, we might well imagine that many other calamities were illustrations of the same thing. But it is chiefly in our own personal experience that we realize that God visits iniquity with punishment, in the ordering of His providences. The sin oftentimes is known only to ourselves. We alone are acquainted with its peculiar characteristics, and its special aggravations, what gracious influences we resisted in order to commit it, and what claims of God or rights of man we ignored or trampled on, in the doing of wrong. When, therefore, calamity came upon us, we were in a condition, and we only, to observe how the affliction was graduated both in kind and degree to our offence, so that we were constrained to say,—"This is the finger of God." No one may have a right to say it to us; but it is both our right and duty to say it to ourselves, This is God's notice and rebuke of my iniquity.

It is particularly with punishments in kind, that we

are able to observe, often in the experience of others, more frequently in our own, that God, through providential occurrences, visits us for our transgressions. A man sells himself to the gratification of some master-passion; and through that master-passion God punishes him. Let us suppose it be to gain wealth. The sin is not in gaining wealth, but in setting the heart upon it. The man virtually dethrones God. He says, not what the Bible says,—"God is the portion of my soul—He alone can satisfy me"; but he says this of money. He says to gold,—"Thou art my confidence." With this he would satisfy all the cravings of his immortal spirit. But God punishes him just in this particular. He may not fail to get the wealth. But his life and experience emphasize the fact, always in saddest ways, and often in startling ways, that for him in wealth there is no satisfaction.

It is so with other transgressions, and courses of wrong-doing. In sins of impurity and ambition and uncharitableness, the Divine displeasure may not be immediately perceptible; but God's unslumbering eye and unforgetful ear are upon the wrong-doer; and in the course of His holy providence the righteous penalty is inflicted.

A history of just such holy providence we have in the lives of these twin brothers in Isaac's household. A record of wrong is here made, but no record of condemnation is written over against it. Is it not, therefore, to be condemned? Mark the course of the history; and remember that history is chiefly but a record of God's doing; and remember further that this is His divinely

authorized and inspired history. Then, noting how affliction, most significantly connected with their sins, comes upon Rebecca and Jacob, we dare not say such conduct meets with the Divine favor. He condemns it, and so must we.

The conspirators in Isaac's household, then, were not immediately, but none the less heavily, punished. Rebecca learned the lesson, needed by many in our times, that "they who will go before God must eventually wait for God." And Jacob found that it is no uncommon experience of the wrong-doer, that "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." And both of them learned that all intermeddling with God's purposes is a usurpation of Divine prerogatives.

It is equally unwarranted in any of us, in these modern times. That God has His wise and holy purposes, is one of the clearest revelations of the Inspired Volume. Those purposes stretch from eternity to eternity, and comprehend our little lives, as well as everything else. But those purposes are not the rule of our lives. They are, for the most part, not revealed. We are not bound to know anything about them. And all conduct of our temporal or spiritual affairs, on the supposition that they are thus or so, may lead to infinitely fatal mistakes. God's revealed will is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

In the matter of the Divine purposes in our salvation, then, our duty is plain. In waiting for God, we sin after the manner of Jacob and his mother. They interfered with God's purpose to justify the doing of wrong; we

interfere with those purposes to justify the doing of nothing. Their sin was that they touched upon the things not revealed; ours is that we will not touch upon the things which are revealed. Nothing can be clearer than that we are not to wait for any supposed indication of God's will, for His will we already know. Whatever may be obscure in the Divine purpose as to our salvation, this much we certainly know,—"This is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." Our only and immediate duty is to accept of His grace as offered to us in Jesus Christ, to obey His commands, to do right, and to live a holy life. Doing this, no mysterious purpose of God, or inexorable law of His kingdom, will ever be found barring us out of the realms of the blessed in heaven. The will of God for our salvation is best expressed in His own invitation,—"Come." "NOW is the accepted time." "TO-DAY, if ye will hear his voice." "Behold, NOW is the day of salvation."

Another common mistake of multitudes, in modern times, is to be observed in—

II.—The Oversight of the Fact, that there are Bad Good Men in the World, as well as Good Bad Men.

The latter part of this statement is readily admitted by those who are disposed to question the former part. Indeed, the most thorough believer in the total depravity of the unregenerate nature will find no difficulty or inconsistency in acknowledging the fact that many, whose characters and lives are, taken as a whole, unmistakably wicked, are nevertheless possessed of many

good, noble, and amiable characteristics. It is with the first part of this statement that many people are most perplexed. They do not so readily acquiesce in the assertion that it is possible for one to be a bad good man. Practically, at any rate, they act upon the belief that there can be no such thing as an imperfect Christian. If a man professes to be a good man—a Christian man—a single deviation from the high standard of his profession is too often sufficient to brand him, in their estimation, as a hypocrite and deceiver—a thoroughly bad man.

It will be interesting, now, to examine this matter, in the light of the history of Jacob and Esau. The one was the servant of God, during the greater portion of his life, at least of that part of which the narrative gives us any information. His elder brother possessed no such character. "Esau appears to have inherited from Rebecca the rash sanguine temperament, but without her nobility of soul; from Isaac he derives a certain fondness for good living—at least of game. Jacob inherited from Isaac the quiet, contemplative manner; from Rebecca, however, a disposition for rapid, prudent, cunning invention. Outwardly regarded, Jacob, on the whole, resembled more the father—Esau the mother."* Besides these inherited traits, the brothers possessed other and very diverse characteristics.

In some respects, Esau unquestionably impresses us more favorably than Jacob. And, in fact, as to some particulars, this is true of the elder brother, up to the

* Lange's "Commentary on Genesis," p. 501.

last notice we have of him in the history, though most apparent in the beginning. "So full of generous impulse, so affectionate toward his aged father, so forgiving toward his brother, so open-handed, so chivalrous; who has not, at times, felt his heart warm toward the poor rejected Esau, and been tempted to join with him, as he cries 'with a great and exceeding bitter cry,'—'Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!' And who does not feel, in like manner, at times, his indignation swell against the younger brother? 'Is he not rightly named Jacob—supplanter—for he hath supplanted me these two times?' He entraps his brother, he deceives his father, he makes a bargain even in his prayer; in his dealings with Laban, in his meeting with Esau he calculates and contrives; he distrusts his neighbors; he regards with prudential indifference the insult to his daughter, and the cruelty of his sons; he hesitates to receive the assurance of Joseph's good-will; he repels, even in his lesser traits, the free confidence that we can not withhold from the Patriarchs of the elder generation."* "The free, easy, frank good-nature of the profane Esau" wins upon us; "the craft, duplicity, and timidity of the religious Jacob" repel us.

Shall we, then, give the palm to Esau? No, my friends. God has given it to Jacob. And, after a more thorough examination of the lives and characters of the twin brothers, we shall agree to the award.

Esau appears best at first; Jacob at last. Esau's best

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* Stanley's "History of the Jewish Church," Vol. I., pp. 58, 59.

traits were upon the surface; his deep, underlying worldliness, and regard for present things, were concealed. On the other hand, the worst features of Jacob's character strike us first. A profounder study of him is necessary to disclose the nobler principles by which he was governed. Well and tersely has it been said,—"On the one hand, fickleness, unsteadiness, weakness, want of faith, and want of principle, ruin and render useless the noble qualities of Esau; and on the other hand, steadfast purpose, resolute sacrifice of present to future, fixed principle, purify, elevate, and turn to lasting good even the baser qualities of Jacob."

Jacob grows, in all the elements of a noble life, from our earliest knowledge of him; but it is not so with his brother. And the growth of the one is due to a Divine, inworking principle; the decline of the other is due to the want of it, and of all desire for it.

This advancement in Jacob is very readily traced, for we have characteristic scenes in his life, twenty years apart. He was clearly a different man, when he returned from his sojourn in the "land of the children of the morning," from the Jacob, who had fled from the face of an angry brother. This fact is attested by the new name given him by the wrestling Angel. Yet there was a germ of Israel in Jacob from the beginning. Always a wrestler and prevailer, he learned, only after many years, that they only are "crowned who strive lawfully." He began to learn the lesson at Bethel. There first, after the long day of weary flight, he began to realize his self-imposed and summary banishment. And there, doubtless, penitence for his sin mingled with his deter-

mination henceforth to serve God. He continued to learn the same lesson in the family and service of Laban. And his mastery of it appears in his wonderful prayer at the fords of the Jabbok, and in the more wonderful wrestling of the patriarch with the Angel of the Covenant. In that twenty years of exile, Jacob's religious character had become vastly stronger and more consistent. We do not wonder, therefore, that, though the long-estranged brothers were reconciled, they yet could not live together. "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

While Jacob had been going up, Esau had been going down. He had evidently ceased to think of, or care for, the birthright blessings. He had married out of the covenant family, and had become more and more alienated from the covenant faith. And yet, like all persons going down hill, it is a significant fact that Esau seems to have made occasional and abortive efforts to arrest the deteriorating process. It was apparently in one such effort, that he married into the family of Abraham, through Ishmael. He soon realized that his early alliances were a source of grief to his godly parents. He now saw that Jacob had been sent away ostensibly to find a wife among his kindred in the east. Stirred with some compunctions of conscience, through the knowledge of these facts, he thought to rectify his mistake, so that he might not lose altogether the good-will of Isaac and Rebecca, for which he yet seemed to care. This led to his taking a third wife, not altogether separated from the covenant line. But this step was only "the effort of a low and earthly mind after the glimpses of high ideals,

which he himself does not comprehend," and therefore it failed.

The story repeats itself in successive generations. We have seen just such characters. We are meeting Jacobs and Esaus every day. The one is a positive character. All his natural qualities are strongly marked. He is selfish, acquisitive, ambitious, envious, not careful of the truth, nor scrupulous of the means by which he obtains his ends; and we shrink from him, repelled by the dominance of these qualities that for the present almost entirely obscure the young but growing plants of grace. The other is largely a negative character. He is easy-going, generous, and amiable. He is the "soul of honor," "a mighty good kind of a man," a "hail fellow well met." Oftentimes he is witty, the life of the company, and the favorite of the multitude. He has, indeed, so many admirable qualities on the surface, that many fail to notice the deep and radical defects—the sunken rocks on which the bark of his hopes and life is sure to be wrecked. These are want of principle, an easy satisfaction with the present to the total neglect of the future, a generosity that outrides justice, and a free living that breaks down the barriers of rectitude; and such like qualities, which must ultimately ruin the most attractive and lovely character.

If, now, we observe the one, we shall not find him perfect by any means. But we shall find him growing day by day. Slowly but surely the qualities that repelled us are being removed, or transformed; while all that is noble and good is getting the ascendency in his life. The governing and germinant principle of his life

holds him steadily to God and righteousness. The needle of his experiences wavers, with conflicting influences, but it settles always pointing to the pole. And in his life, as in Jacob's, "it is reserved to the chemistry of God to separate the dross of sin from the pure metal of a pious striving." If we observe the other, we shall notice a very different process going on. All those attractive qualities, with which good health and unfailing cheerful spirits have so much to do, become dim, or entirely disappear, with the waning of the causes that produced them. As the rains on the mountains melt the snow which made them look so beautifully rounded and perfect, thereby disclosing the dark and rugged and unchanging peaks beneath; so the storms of life soon scatter the superficial qualities which made the youthful character so lovely, and bring out in startling prominence the unchanging lines of a base and ungainly spirit.

In rectifying the mistake, therefore, upon which we have been reflecting, it is important that we should bear in mind these two things, viz.: First, there is an essential difference between a spiritual and a worldly mind. Secondly, the only infallible test of a spiritual character is growth in holiness of life. A failure to mark the one may lead to mistaken judgments of others; without noting the other, all judgments of the spiritual character and condition of others are, to say the least, premature.

Still another widely prevalent mistake, especially among young people, is solemnly emphasized in this primitive story, viz.:

III.—Forgetfulness of the Truth, that Destinies frequently turn upon Trifles.

This was Esau's mistake in selling his birthright. Unlike his brother, who was a man of the future, he lived only in the present. The fact that Jacob sinned did not excuse him. He despised his birthright, and preferred a temporary delight. He had denied himself the gratification of his appetite through the day, and while engaged perhaps in the congenial excitements of hunting, or other occupations of the field. But now the blessings of the birthright have less restraining power upon him than his daily pleasures. He is ready to sacrifice them all for a transient gratification of a bodily craving. "For one morsel of meat he sold his birthright," forfeiting all the privileges of the first-born, the blessing of his father, and the high and honorable place of progenitor of the covenant race and covenant Seed. We may sorrow with Esau; and we may even feel like questioning the justice of the transaction; but we may not, and can not, deny the fact. A great and unchangeable destiny turned upon the doings of that hour, when the tired, hungry hunter came in from the field.

And Esau himself, afterward, realized the fact. He seems yet to have entertained the hope that he might receive the paternal blessing, which Isaac was not unwilling to bestow upon him. But, when he failed in this, through the Divine ordering, then he awoke to the fact that he had acted very foolishly. The result was his bitter and unavailing lamentation,—"Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my

father." So Cain bewailed the consequences of his hasty sin in lifting his hand against his brother. He went out from the presence of the Lord, crying in the bitterness of his soul,—"My punishment is greater than I can bear." So also was Judas left to mourn the irrevocable consequences of his brief bargain with the chief priests, as in anguish of spirit, he cast from him the accursed pieces, and went from the temple crying,—"I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood."

The dish of broth was a trifling thing. The choice of it by Esau was apparently an insignificant act. But it changed the history of his race, and indeed of the world. And the patriarch's case is not a solitary one in the Divine administration of human affairs. If it seem to us excessively severe, we are to remember that in the circumstances of our daily life, the same thing is occurring again and again. We neither deny the fact, nor question the justice of God in so ordering.

The soldier, furloughed and journeying home, accomplishes the long ride in safety. But, when just in sight of familiar scenes and expectant friends, his eager spirit leads him to a too hasty step, and he falls under the remorseless wheels, to perish. A merchant, delayed by the friendly greeting of a neighbor, steps to the pier to find the steamer, on which his family have already embarked, moving off; and his wife, for the moment crazed by the prospect of separation, flings herself from the vessel, only to find a watery grave. That home is broken up, and that man's life is henceforth shadowed in consequence of a trivial act, measured only by a moment.

These are illustrations of innocent trivialities result-

ing in irreversible and momentous consequences. The experiences of human life will furnish many incidents, in which the trivial deed was one of sin and wrong. Trifles men call them. But men are mistaken. The handsome, happy, honored young man, the pride of his parents, and the idol of society, puts the name of his employer to a piece of business paper. It is the work of but a moment. But the results are as lasting as life. The man falls from his high place; and, even if he escapes the penalty of the law, disgrace and ruin are too often the consequence of his single and, as he thinks, insignificant act.

It ought not to surprise us, then, that the same principle should be found influential in spiritual things. And it is a woful mistake to overlook this fact. God is pleased often to make our eternal destiny turn upon single and, as we regard them, trifling actions. It does not require a vast effort to say No, to the pleadings of the Holy Spirit; and He may take us at our word, and leave us to ourselves, to make our henceforth unobstructed way down to death. The "trifle" that hinders us may not be in itself wrong; but because we put it in the place of God, and use it to bar out from our hearts the Divine Visitor, it becomes the one last step, that precipitates us into the gulf of ruin. A young law-student, religiously trained and educated, tried for many years to make himself an infidel. In a time of spiritual quiet in the community he was brought under deep conviction through the strivings of the Holy Spirit. Just while in such a state, a friend asked him to write a deed. There was no haste for it. But he chose to do

it, rather than listen to the voice of the Heavenly Messenger. It was the work of but a few moments; but when it was done, the Divine Spirit was gone. The halting soul did not have a single conviction of sin for ten long years after he thus for a trifle said to the Spirit of grace,—"Go thy way for this time." The spiritual destiny of ten years turned upon that trifling act. Alas! how much is it to be feared that eternal destinies often turn upon just such trifles! God, who has waited so long, is waiting now no more.

We must not forget also that destiny justly turns thus upon trifles, because trifles furnish the deepest and truest insight into character. It was so with Esau. This was not the first time he had looked contemptuously upon the blessing of the birthright. He had grown to man's estate, in the habit of gratifying his fleshly appetites, to the neglect of his spiritual nature. And, so, when the hour of trial came, the occasion needed to be but a little thing to prove how unworthy he was of the privileges which he despised.

It is a solemn inquiry, with which we may close our reflections upon these contrasted characters: How many among us are like the elder brother? How many there are with whom a transient pleasure is of more value, practically, than all the promises of God. "The language of their hearts and conduct is, 'Give me the gratification of my desires; I must and will have it, whatever it cost me. If I can not have it but at the peril of my soul, so be it. Let my hope in Christ be destroyed; let my prospects of heaven be forever darkened; only give

me the indulgence which my lusts demand.'"* How sorrowful must be the unavailing lamentation of all such, when God the Spirit takes them at their word, and leaves them alone! They have chosen the trifle, and for the trifle they perish. Rather than deny themselves for a little time in this present world, they will sacrifice all hope for the world which is to come. A mess of pottage is better to their earthly souls than the most honorable place among the Israel of God. And God says of them: As they choose, so shall they live.

May His gracious Spirit enable us to choose that "good part which shall never be taken from us."

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* Bush's "Notes on Genesis," Vol. II., p. 70.

III.

MOSES AND AARON.

THE providence of God is both general and special. The same guiding hand that was shaping Israel's way to the Exodus, was also preparing the leaders for the part they were to act in the great deliverance. While God was permitting Pharaoh to lay heavier burdens upon the people, until their bondage became exceedingly bitter, in the same hour He was sending Moses into Egypt, and sending Aaron to meet Moses. In this wilderness-meeting of the two brothers we have our introduction to the future leaders of the emancipated nation. Two hundred and fifteen years have passed away since Jacob left the hills of promise to dwell in the fertile plains of Goshen. Another dynasty has risen to the throne of empire since the days of Joseph. A different king now sways the sceptre from him who wore the crown in Moses' childhood.

The patriarchs are venerable men of fourscore years, as they pass from the solitudes of desert Midian into the populous valley of the Nile, and exchange the sublime simplicity of nature's mountains for the paling splendors of Egypt's imperial court. For forty years they are to

be the Divinely-commissioned and publicly-recognized organizers and leaders of a new and peculiar nation.

From this point, therefore, in the life of the Levite brothers, we may look both ways. From a backward glance upon their separate and widely different careers we shall gather light for their henceforth united life, beginning on the banks of the Nile and ending on the borders of Canaan.

I.—This retrospect reveals their diverse, yet fitting, training for their respective parts in the great work.

Moses and Aaron were alike in sharing the influences and blessings of a religious home in their childhood. The narrative, indeed, affords but momentary glimpses of the inner life of the household of Amram and Jochebed. But these glimpses are enough to convince the careful reader that, in the midst of the debasing influences of bondage to an idolatrous people, this family retained, in an unusual degree, the knowledge and worship of God. It is profoundly suggestive that the early years of these leaders of God's host were spent in the bosom of a family that feared and loved His holy name.

The history of His Church shows that this is no extraordinary method of Divine Providence. When God wants a leader for His children, He entrusts him to the genial atmosphere and careful culture of a believing and holy house. Whatever influences the coming years shall bring to mould their characters and form their lives, the strong foundations of future greatness for the leaders in the kingdom of God are usually laid in the scenes where Jehovah is worshiped, and the supremacy of spirit-

ual things is a daily and well-nigh unconscious recognition. There is a wide-spread impression to the contrary, it is true. Many seem to think that he is best fitted to lead sinners in the right way, and to guide the Church of God in her warfare with the world, who, without any Christian nurture and training, has spent his early life in all the excesses of wickedness, from which he has been rescued by a manifest interposition of Almighty power. The course of history shows that God has never acted upon this principle in the guidance of His people.

From the religious influences of their early life, these brothers, born to lead, went forth to widely different futures. The one was destined to be a prince, and the other to be a slave. The same wise hand of Israel's God was shaping their ways and fitting them for their pre-appointed lot. In the toil and sorrows of the common bondage, Aaron learned to sympathize with the afflictions of his brethren. He thus acquired, as only he could acquire them, the qualifications for becoming the high-priest of his people—an office pre-eminently demanding of its incumbent that he should be one, "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."

As grand a leader as was Moses, and mighty as he was in mediating for his people, we recognize at once his separateness from the race of bondmen. We readily see that no man who has spent one-third of his life, and that third its formative period, in one social position, can fully enter into the feelings, hopes, and trials

of those in a lower scale—as men graduate the scale. The minister, "in things pertaining to God," must be "taken from among men." The Lord's Christ was himself no exception. Nor was Aaron. It was the slave, not the prince, who was destined to minister at the altar.

And yet the training of Moses was equally well fitted to prepare him for his responsible trust. What the quiet, uneventful, every-day life of servitude did for Aaron in developing the qualities and aptitudes in which he excelled, the life of Moses as a prince of the empire did for him. He was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." As one destined for a high place in the greatest kingdom then existing in the world, he acquired that extensive knowledge of law and government and military affairs, which would be so helpful to him in the great work of organizing Israel into a nation. He obtained, also, what a slave could never get, the habit of self-reliance and the power to command, so needful in one who is to be the leader of men. In this respect Aaron signally failed. Through all the forty years of their joint leadership, the elder brother leaned upon the younger.

There is an important lesson in this fact for all who have children to educate and train for an immortal destiny. In early life, and while they are yet at home, they are like the house-plants. You watch them with unslumbering carefulness. You seek to shield them from every rude and wintry blast. And in this you are wise. But this you can not always do. The day comes on apace, when you must expose them to the sun and rain. This is a necessity for not only their growth, but also for

their life. The shielded, shaded plant will sicken and die. Or, dropping the figure, the time is soon at hand when your child must take his destiny in his own hands. You can not keep him at home. You can not cover his head from the storm. Nor is it best that you should. If his character is ever to possess anything more than negative qualities, he must be tried and tested. And your parental duty will be best performed, not by detaining him in the enervating atmosphere of an untried and easy life, but rather by planting the roots of right principles, and then superintending their growth under a wise daily and increasing exposure to the storm. Then Amram and Jochebed may die; but in God's time the weather-beaten, trial-tried Moses shall step into the breach for Israel's deliverance, while the home-bred, storm-shielded Aaron fails in every crisis.

Especially will this be so, if he learns, as Moses did in Midian, in connection with a reliance upon self so far as man is concerned, to rest also and only upon God. All other self-reliance is perfect weakness, when there is needed a mountain of strength. That second forty-year period in the life of Moses was as important in preparing him for leading Israel as was the first. He was to be not only a leader of men, but also a minister for God. And the ambassador who shall properly represent the mind and wishes of the king, must wait long at the court of his Sovereign. To all of us there come waiting periods in life. God takes us, blinded by the shifting scenes of our busy life, out of the town, that He may put His fingers upon our eyes and cause us to look up and see the things which before were invisible. In the

midst of mountain solitudes, in the simple duties of pastoral life, and in the quiet joys of a loving home, Moses came to know and understand God, as he should never have done in the court of Pharaoh. In the life of almost every great leader of the Church of God we shall find this waiting period. It is an interval in life, and oftentimes to the person himself it may seem like a useless and aimless period. The gates of one era have closed, and those of another have not opened. And, so, the man, perhaps conscious of increasing powers, impatiently awaits the destined field on which they shall find their fitting exercise. "They also serve who only wait"; and the waiting that is Divinely appointed shall never be in vain.

Of all the characters of modern history, Moses is most nearly reproduced in William the Silent, Prince of Orange.* The parallel between the two lives furnishes a number of notable points. They were alike in the possession of pious mothers. We know what Jochebed, the mother of Moses, must have been, from what her son afterward became. The mother of William of Orange is known in history as Juliana of Stolberg. The historian thus speaks of this remarkable woman,—"She was a person of most exemplary character and unaffected piety. She instilled into the minds of all her children the elements of that devotional sentiment which was her own striking characteristic; and it was destined that the seed sown early should increase to an abundant harvest. Nothing can be more tender or more

* See Dr. Hamilton's "Moses the Man of God," page 26.

touching than the letters, which still exist from her hand, written to her illustrious sons in hours of anxiety or anguish, and to the last recommending to them, with as much earnest simplicity as if they were still little children at her knee, to rely always, in the midst of the trials and dangers which were to beset their paths in life, upon the great hand of God. Among the mothers of great men, Juliana of Stolberg deserves a foremost place; and it is no slight eulogy that she was worthy to have been the mother of William of Orange, and of Lewis, Adolphus, Henry, and John of Nassau."*

The leader of the United Netherlands was like the leader of United Israel also, in the fact that both were brought up as pages in an imperial court. Moses, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, was doubtless from early life familiar with all "the pomp and circumstance" of a kingly household. And William of Orange led a similar life in the court of Charles V. Obviously, then, they were alike in the training they received, among the grandees of empires, in the science of government. It was a wise providential arrangement that these two leaders of God's chosen people, in their struggles for liberty, should be trained and qualified for this work by the very powers which, in the accomplishment of their missions, they were to overthrow.

But more than all, these leaders were alike in the long dormant power of their mothers' early instruction, and in the supremacy of that teaching in later life. What the parents of Moses did for him must have been done early.

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* Motley's "History of the Dutch Republic," Vol. I., page 235.

"How many testimonies of God's love to the fathers of their nation his mother dropped into his youthful ear; how much she told him of God as 'the exceeding great reward' of His believing people; how well she put the contrast between 'the treasures of Egypt' and the treasures laid up for God's then persecuted people;—these points are rather left to our inference than definitely stated; but we may be very sure that the faith of Moses took hold of these grand truths of then extant revelation, fixed its hold early, and held fast through all his future life."* But long years passed away before they began to exert such a commanding power over him as to lead him to the great choice of his destiny. In the case of William the Silent also, we may well believe that the early instructions of Juliana of Stolberg were never entirely forgotten. But slowly they came to exert a controlling influence upon his life and character. He had come to mature years before he was prepared to be the commander of the little army of the Dutch Republic in its struggle for independence.

Thus were the leaders of the future nation of Israel prepared and trained for their respective places—Aaron in the trials of the common bondage, and Moses in Mizraim's highest school of government. Meanwhile the bondage grew more bitter. The suffering slaves began to cry to God. And God heard them. But Jehovah works in "infinite leisure," and it required time to prepare the leaders for their work, as also to prepare the people to be led. But at last the work is done; and

* "The Pentateuch." By Dr. Henry Cowles, page 177.

now another scene opens in the contrasted lives of Moses and Aaron.

II.—With such a Training, the Venerable Brothers appeared before the King of Egypt.

The story is a familiar one; and it is unnecessary to rehearse it upon these pages. Every Bible reader knows it thoroughly. The deliverance of Israel from the bondage in Egypt is one of the grand events of ancient history. Not by invasion, war, or conquest was the rescue accomplished. It was done by the direct intervention of a Divine Power. The preliminary stages of that deliverance demand our attention just now, as the portion of the history that throws special light upon the character, talents, and mutual relations of Moses and Aaron.

The leaders of Israel before Pharaoh, is one of the most interesting and solemn scenes in the Pentateuch. It is the first recorded contest between a pretended and a real supernatural. Egypt was the home of the proudest and mightiest civilization. Her learned men were the sages of the world. By their vast knowledge of the secrets of science, and their wonderful proficiency in mysterious arts, they had gained and still maintained a strong hold upon the minds of the common people, being held in repute by them as the august ministers of the Superhuman Powers. And Pharaoh and his court believed in the supernatural. Whether or not his wise men did, is not so certain. But they were not so progressive as some of the wise men of modern times. The latter have succeeded in getting rid altogether of the supernatural element of religion. It is not simply un-

necessary. It is both absurd and impossible. The rulers of Egypt had not "advanced" so far. They believed in wonder-works, as tokens of Divine power, and evidences of a Divine commission. They were quite ready, then, to witness the contest, when the wise men of Egypt accepted the gauge of battle from the Hebrew slaves, and entered the lists to confound their claims to the exclusive possession of supernatural powers and of a Divine commission.

The battle was fought before Pharaoh. The scene is laid in the royal palace. On the one side, stand the leaders of Israel—Moses and Aaron. On the other side, are the champions of Mizraim—Jannes and Jambres. The conflict continued for many days. And, for a time, the enemies of God and Israel seem to have held their own. With their marvellous feats of jugglery, the royal necromancers were able to simulate even some of the miracles of Moses and Aaron. But they were only the more plainly rushing to their own destruction. They were no match for the accumulated resources of Omnipotence. And, before the growing evidences of Jehovah's power, they were at length compelled to retire, crying, in dismay, to their more obstinate and blinded sovereign,—"This is the finger of God."

This contest is replete with lessons of wisdom, by no means inappropriate to many of the modern phases of religious thought and conflicts. The magicians of Egypt denied the supernatural, and aimed to discredit the Divine legation of Moses. The apostles of modern infidelity are engaged in the same conflict. Theirs is a battle with the supernatural. The unconscious tendency of

the two great forces hostile to Christianity illustrates this fact. Let us notice the progress of Rationalistic Criticism. It began with calling in question the separate wonder-works of the Gospel. But it was soon seen that it was useless to assail the New Testament miracles, so long as that miracle of miracles—the Christ himself—remained. So the great Christological controversy began. In getting rid of the Divine character of Christ, the first step was to charge lying and fraud upon Him and His apostles. When that proved a failure, the next step was to represent Christ as the victim of self-deception and enthusiasm. But this was soon seen to be an inadequate explanation of His personality. So the third step, in this line of assault, was to charge a false conception of Christ upon the apostles. Then, reviewing this controversy as to the person of Christ, it was finally discovered that it was in vain to assail the separate miracles of the Bible, or to deny the Divine Character of the Christ, if yet the miracle of creation and a Creator remains. If God exists at all, then somewhere, and at some period, there must have been a manifestation of supernatural, miraculous power. And, if this be so, then here is laid a broad foundation for all the miracles of Christianity. So, says the advocate of modern infidelity, the supernatural must first of all be overthrown.

We may see the same awful progress in the other hostile wing of infidelity, just now so rampant in the world—Materialism. This method of attack begins in mental philosophy. Here materialism becomes sensationalism, using that term in its strict philosophic sense.

We know nothing but what we learn through the senses; and of course then we have no intuitive truths. Then there is no intuitive knowledge of God. Again, we know nothing of things, but only the relations of things. And, of course, if we can not know material things, how can we know the invisible and immaterial? Yet again, there is no such thing as cause and effect; and so the argument for the existence of God from design is of no value. But a second step, in the progress of this form of infidelity, is necessary. What avails it to discuss the operations of the mind, while you admit that the mind itself exists? So another step in advance is to be taken. Materialism now passes from the realms of mental philosophy into the domain of psychology, and ventures to assert the identity of mind and matter. And still this position is unsatisfactory and untenable. Another step is inevitable. It will not do to set the foundations of moral action in the right of the thing—in moral obligation; because the reasoning thence to a moral Supreme Ruler is immediate and irresistible. Hence in morals, materialism becomes utilitarianism. Nor is this the end of the process. Yet another step is a necessity. Materialism, which in mental philosophy is pure sensationalism, and in psychology obliterates all distinction between matter and mind, and in morals is simply utilitarianism, must now, through a logical necessity, take another position. The line is wholly untenable, if there be a God. If God exists, we must serve Him. If He be an extramundane, spiritual being, we are bound to worship Him in spirit and in truth. So, this form of infidelity stands with the other confronting the idea of the supernatural.

In all substantial particulars, it is the renewal of the old contest in the court of Pharaoh.

But it would carry us too far out of our course, to enter into it at any greater length. We are interested just now, most of all, in the champions of Israel. We can hardly fail to notice the resemblance of this scene before the king of Egypt to another, later in the inspired record—one of those curious repetitions of which all history is so full—the preaching of Paul and Barnabas in the streets of Lystra, the city of Lycaonia. In both cases, the servants of Jehovah were seeking the overthrow of a strong delusion, and the emancipation of a people from centuries of bondage. In both cases, they gave signal tokens of a Divine commission in wonder-works. In both cases, they were mutual helpers of each other. In both cases, one only stood forth as the chief speaker. What Paul was in Lystra, Aaron was in the capital of Egypt.

Here, however, the resemblance ceases. Paul, so eloquent as to be surnamed Mercurius, was in every respect superior to Barnabas. But Aaron surpassed his brother only in his golden mouth and silver tongue. Before the grandees of the empire, the eloquent slave stood forth most prominent; but the princely Moses was prince and leader still. As with Jacob and Esau, the elder still served the younger. The flowery speech and showy eloquence of Aaron may have given him importance in the courtly throng of the royal palace; but the grand administrative gifts of Moses, less attractive to the superficial gaze, were of priceless value to the toiling race of slaves. The wisdom of God is signally manifested in sending

Moses and Aaron together. Thus the Lord sent His disciples two and two. As with the Apostles, the leaders of Israel were the complements of each other. The deficiencies of the one were supplemented by the other. In the court of Egypt, and before the voluble minions of despotism, Moses needed, and was greatly aided by, his brother, Aaron.

The case was just reversed, in the next great scene of their life, to which we now turn.

III.—In the Presence of God, before Mount Sinai, Aaron greatly needed Moses.

The Mediator of the old covenant was up in the Holy Mount. For well-nigh six weeks, the people had seen nothing of Moses. They had been emancipated from Egyptian bondage; but they were still enslaved by the idolatrous notions, which they had learned during the centuries of servitude. Easily forgetting, therefore, the second commandment, which they had so recently heard from the Almighty's own mouth, they sought from Aaron some visible symbol of the God, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. This was the form of their idolatry—a breach of the second, rather than of the first, commandment. They did not purpose to dethrone Jehovah, but to worship Him through an intervening symbol. This also was the sin of Jeroboam (1 Kings xii. 28), as distinguished from the sin of Ahab (1 Kings xvi. 31). The first broke the second commandment; the second broke the first. The practical effect, however, upon the people was the same in both cases. They forgot God, and served their graven images. It was so also

in the earlier instance recorded in this episode in the life of Aaron. The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. They shrank from the presence of a pure, sin-hating God; and by this happy device, contrived ostensibly to help them come near to Him, they had succeeded in putting Him far away. And so they had a grand time of mirth and jollity. Feasting and revelry marked the worship of this god of their imagination.

We can hardly doubt how Moses would have received this request of the people for some visible representation of the great and dreadful Jehovah. But the trial brings to light the weakness of Aaron's character. He had been accustomed to rely upon the stronger Moses, rather than upon the arm of the Almighty; and so when his support is gone, he is easily overcome. He yields to the temptation, presented by the clamorous multitude, and falls. And in his fall, he brings the wrath of God upon the congregation of Israel.

A remarkable feature of this temptation and fall of Aaron is the fact that he failed in the one direction in which his strength lay. We can not imagine that more than once in a life, so long even as Aaron's, is there afforded so grand a field and opportunity for the display of eloquence, as now lay before the elder brother. Surely, in the solitude of the desert, before the grand mountains, and especially in the presence of yon cloud-capped, flaming summit, the voice, which has charmed the princes of Egypt, while yet it thwarted their nefarious designs, will now be heard in trumpet tones dissuading the people from idolatry! All the conditions of powerful oratory

are present—a grand theme, a momentous crisis, a vast audience, and a sublime end—but the tongue of the orator is dumb. God had said to him,—"I know that he can speak well"; but he has nothing to say for the God who thus commended him to his hesitating, stammering brother. Aaron fails in the most critical moment of his life—on the field of his greatest powers!

The fall of Aaron may be taken as an illustration of a general law in the defection of God's people;—they nearly always fail, each in the point in which he is strongest. The great sin of the truthful and trusting Abraham was prevarication, that grew out of unbelief in the Divine care. It was the pure-minded David who committed adultery. It was the brave, intrepid Peter, who, from shameless cowardice, denied his Lord. So the eloquent Aaron is dumb in the very arena of all his former triumphs. Paul says,—"When I am weak, then am I strong." With every Christian it is equally true,—"When I am strong, then am I weak." We are never so near our overthrow, as when we think we are buttressed with all possible forces of our spirit against the assaults of our enemies. In the Christian warfare, he is the mightiest who is conscious that in himself he is "perfect weakness," and who seeks help from one mightier and stronger than he.

Aaron needs Moses, and Moses appears. Like a blast of north wind among the balmy but enervating breezes, he comes suddenly down from the holy mount, to tone up the laxity of life among the people. Before that blast the sickliest plants are bound to die. The remainder shall begin a new and healthier life. The eloquent

Aaron is silent and ashamed; but the stammering Moses has found a mighty and decisive tongue. And the newborn nation, heading to the ruin of idolatry, is turned and saved. How quickly and with what vigorous measures it was done! God sent him hastily out of His presence; and he hurried down with the young man Joshua into the camp of the revellers. "What a scene to Moses! How is his soul fired with holy indignation! He casts to the earth the two tablets and breaks them at the foot of the mount. Next, he demolishes the calf; grinds it to powder; mixes it with water and compels the people to drink it. A million of men are in dismay before him—all powerless to resist. He turns to Aaron, his elder brother, to rebuke him. Aaron's defense is both tame and lame, as that of a man thoroughly ashamed of himself. 'Thou knowest the people, bent on mischief. They besought me to make them a calf; I told them to bring forward their gold; they did so. I threw it into the fire—and the calf made itself.'"* Then follows speedily the solemn separation between the friends of God and Moses, and those who would still cleave to idolatry. And thus, with the dire work of judgment and punishment, the sin of the people and the sad results of Aaron's fall are turned away.

Immediately after this tragic event in Israel's history, Aaron is consecrated as the high-priest of his people. It was a singular and suggestive sequence of events. After his fall, in which he was followed by so many, he is restored to the Divine favor, and henceforth estab-

* "The Pentateuch," *ut supra*, p. 345.

lished as the official mediator and intercessor of his erring brethren. In the earthly life of our Lord there is a suggestive parallel. And both this and that are marvellous exhibitions of His forgiving and restoring mercy. It was the brave Peter who failed through cowardice. But the Lord helped him up. And, in a scene of inimitable pathos and tenderness, we behold the Chief Shepherd restoring the fallen Apostle to his place as the shepherd of His lambs and His sheep. Who so fitted to strengthen his brethren as one who has himself experienced the power of temptation! Thus was Aaron restored. The tongue that was silent in the Lord's behalf before the people, is Divinely chosen to speak in behalf of the people before the Lord.

While we marvel at the grace of God as thus exhibited, let us remember that it is God's grace, not man's, that does this. It is God's prerogative to restore to his place the fallen leader. By man he may not be put back in the teacher's place. He who once has led and taught in Israel, and has fallen, may be forgiven by both God and man upon repentance and reformation, and be numbered again among the believing hosts; but it is one of the rarest of all rare things that the Church of God may safely venture to recommission him as a leader of the people. If God does it, let us acknowledge it and be thankful, but we may well shrink from taking such a solemn matter into our own hands.

This fall of Aaron suggests another and final scene in the contrasted lives of these Levite brothers, viz.—

IV.—The failure before the Rock in Kadesh.

Well-nigh forty years have passed away since the fall of Aaron at the foot of the holy mount. But four persons remain of them that were men when they left the bondage in Egypt. The long journey of the wilderness was almost ended. In a little while they were to enter the land of Canaan. Over that gloomy period in Israel's history the inspired penman has thrown the veil of an absolute silence. What took place, how they lived, and where they journeyed,—of these things we know nothing. We can well imagine that it was a period of great trial to the leaders of the people. And, in proportion as the burden of caring for the multitude increased, so doubtless grew their longings for the rest of the land of promise. In like manner, as they approached the goal of their hopes, how high those hopes must have risen, and with what commanding power must they have dominated their whole nature! They were so near the end! The day of toil would soon be over! What joyful anticipations must have been theirs!

So they came to Kadesh. They were near the land of promise, but painfully the people realized that they were yet in the wilderness. "The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." They were the children of a rebellious generation. And they inherited the complaining spirit of their fathers. They were ready to perish with thirst, and no cooling fountains yet opened in their paths. They were journeying over a barren, arid, burning desert. They forgot the God who had led them forty years. They remembered

not His many mercies to them in the past. And with unreasoning petulance, the multitude once more break out in murmuring against God and their leaders. There was an unusual bitterness in their complaints. They even wished they had died with their brethren who fell under the just displeasure of the Almighty.

It was under these circumstances that Moses and Aaron were commanded to bring water out of the rock for the perishing people. And here they sinned themselves against God; and sinned so grievously that the Lord, who had helped them and borne with them for so many years, now tells them they can never enter the land of promise.

We can not do better than seriously reflect upon the nature of this sin of Israel's leaders, while we seek to impress deeply upon our minds its causes and consequences.

The sin of Israel's chosen and long-tried leaders is thus well described by a recent commentator,—"This unreasonable and even cruel reflection of the people upon Moses stirred his indignation, excited him unduly, and his anger found expression in ill-advised words from his lips. The Lord had told him to take Aaron his brother, to gather the people together before the rock, and then *speak* to the rock before their eyes, and it should give forth water. When the eventful moment came, Moses, instead of saying, 'Ye have sinned against the Lord your God, yet in His mercy He will give you rivers of water from this rock upon the word of command from His servant,' said, as in the record, 'Hear now, ye rebels, must *we* fetch you water out of this

rock?' In circumstances where man should be nothing and God all in all—man only a consciously unworthy instrument, and God the Supreme and ever to be honored Power—it was one of the saddest infirmities of the best of men to put himself so prominently forward, and thrust the Great God so ungratefully into the background. Then, moved by the same excited passion, instead of speaking to the rock, he smote it with his rod, not once only, but twice. Yet the Lord did not rebuke him with failure, but despite of his bad spirit, gave forth water abundantly. The rebuke upon both Moses and Aaron came shortly after in the form of an absolute prohibition upon their entering the land of promise. They had *so* dishonored the Lord in this case at Kadesh, that He must needs express His disapprobation by denying to both of them the long-desired consummation of entering the goodly land."*

The sin of Moses was like Aaron's at Mt. Sinai. It was a failure in his strongest point. The meekest of men here gives way to an ungovernable passion. He, who for many years had been so forgetful of himself; who had again and again refused to let Jehovah destroy Israel that he might make of his own descendants a great nation; who had cared so little for his own place and authority, that he could wish all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them—such a man we find here, with a self-assertion that surprises us, putting himself and his brother forward, as if they were the Source of Israel's blessings,

* "The Pentateuch," *ut supra*, pages 226–227.

and leaving the Mighty God altogether out of the account. And we are ready to say, Can this be the Moses whom we have known for forty years as the most unselfish and lowly of men?

We may well ask, as we are immediately prompted to do, What was the cause of this failure at Kadesh? And the reason is not difficult to discover. It was evidently a want of watchfulness. And it grew chiefly out of the fact that they were so near the end of their journey. They had walked long and carefully before the Lord. They had been so tried by the murmurings and impatience of the people for so many years, that now it seemed as if they could stand anything. So near the end of so long a way, and so tested and approved through many years, it is not likely that anything else can ever overcome us. This was doubtless their thought, and under its seductive power they relaxed their watchfulness. And just here, while they were off guard, the enemy found them and overthrew them.

The lesson should not be lost upon us. Our own times, and possibly our own experiences, furnish parallel instances of grievous failures just as the end is drawing nigh. Congratulating ourselves upon having made so much of the journey in safety, upon having proved faithful to our trust thus far, and being joyfully animated with the near prospect of entering into our rest; so occupied and so easily puffed up, before we are aware of it the enemy has thrown his seductive toils around us, and we have fallen. With watchful eye and firmest step we have walked the entire way, only to trip and fall at the end.

The consequences of this sin of Moses and Aaron are exceedingly mournful. They are shut out of Canaan. The halting, murmuring, sinning host whom they have led, and with whom they have borne for forty years, go over the Jordan and enter into the land of their love and desire; but the leaders must die in the wilderness. "If the Lord's rebuke of Moses seem severe, let it be considered that his sin was very great because he had been admitted into so near communion with God—such communion as had never been granted to any other man. If the guilt of sin be as the light sinned against, we are not likely to overestimate the guilt of his. The Lord speaks of it as rebellion (Num. xxvii. 14). And manifestly his sin was so public as well as so flagrant, that it became vital to the honor of God's name and government to rebuke it unmistakably."*

The exclusion from Canaan was a sore sorrow to Moses, and no doubt to his older brother. Most pathetically does Israel's leader plead with God for a reversal of the sentence. But God would not grant it, nor would He suffer him to ask it any more. The sin of these brothers was forgiven, but the consequences were inevitable. Their case is but one of many illustrations of the fact that, as to its results, our sin is often "written with a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond, and is graven in the rock forever." The most terrible wound may be healed; but the terrible scar will still remain, an unremovable token of the fierce contest.

The leaders of Israel were forgiven and accepted with

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* "The Pentateuch," *ut supra*, page 227.

God. They were honored for what they had done, but it is plain that their work is done. They drop from the history. The planting of Israel in the land of promise goes on, as certainly and as well, as if Moses and Aaron were at the head of the Lord's host. Joshua and Eleazer shall do what their fathers failed to accomplish. The Israelites go over Jordan; but Moses and Aaron find their sepulchres in the mountains of the wilderness. The sun of their earthly lives goes grandly down. But he sinks behind the darkness of a cloud-cast horizon.

IV.

BALAK AND BALAAM.

BALAK and Balaam stand in wide contrast with Moses and Aaron. Our examination of the latter theme led us to trace the life and character, the trainings and trials, the failures and falls, and the way and work of two of God's eminent saints. That study was to little purpose, if it did not convince us that the leaders of Israel were taught and led and perfected by the gracious influences of the Infinite Spirit. And, indeed, there is no more interesting study, at any time, than to follow, through all its diversified characteristics, the working of the Divine Spirit in the hearts and lives of the children of God. To be able to lift the veil which covers any human life, and mark the foot-prints of the Holy Spirit as He comes to the heart in transforming power, and then to observe His operation, as with varied natural, spiritual, and providential instrumentalities, He carries forward His blessed work to its perfect end;—this is no small privilege. And to every pious mind this is one of the principal charms of Scripture Biography—noting the progress of the Spirit's work, when the subject of the story is a servant of God.

But, on the other hand, it is a melancholy duty, but not for that reason any less necessary, to mark the dealings of the Spirit of God with those, who in the end are revealed as rejecting His gracious influences and perishing among His enemies. Such a duty now devolves upon us, as we seek to analyze somewhat the two characters, which form the subject of our present study. The most valuable lessons of this story are those which emphasize the presence and influences of the Spirit of God in the hearts of two wicked men; who yet chose to remain obdurate and impenitent, and so to perish.

The children of Moab, descendants of righteous Lot, were not doomed to destruction in the overthrow of the accursed Canaanites. But Balak, their king, chose to set himself in opposition to the tribes of Israel—perhaps, as Edom, resisting their passage through his territory, as they journeyed to their promised inheritance. He had heard of the wonderful achievements of these wandering tribes; and he knew that they could not have accomplished these things without the help of some superhuman power. He believed in such powers. And realizing his inability to cope with the mysterious forces, which were helping Israel, in his own unaided human strength, he determined to secure for his side of the conflict also the help of some other superhuman power. "He understood well that the strength of Israel lay in the strength of her God. There was miracle there—superhuman aid coming in from a higher Power; and he had no idea of anything which he could bring into the field against this save the most potent divination and magic." *

* Dr. Henry Cowles on "The Pentateuch," p. 365.

For this reason he sent for Balaam. This man was unquestionably endowed with extraordinary wisdom and knowledge. He was held in high repute as one in whom dwelt "the spirit of the holy gods." His fame was widespread. Men believed that he possessed occult and wondrous powers, and that his blessings were blessings indeed, and that his curses were curses indeed. And, as a matter of fact, he was honored of the true God to make known His will to men—perhaps in instances of which the Sacred Record is silent—certainly to Balak, the king of Moab, in the emergency which he and his people are now called upon to confront. And so the king sends for the prophet, with an urgency that will take no refusal. Twice the ambassadors of Balak bow at the feet of the lordly prophet. With his earnest entreaties they are commissioned to bear from the king his smoothest words and greatest promises. With a graphic pen the sacred writer makes us see all these allurements of the royal suppliant loftily spurned, and yet after all eagerly accepted. In this fact we find our first lesson from these related characters. Both were bad men. Both were bent on accomplishing, each his own end. Most vividly does their conduct illustrate—

I.—Fair Speech and Foul Life.

Israel was overcome by Moab. But the tribes of the Lord were not conquered by force of arms. They were led astray by the seductive wiles of adversaries in the guise of friends—of whom they could have used the language of the Psalmist in a later age,—"The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his

heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords." In this assault upon Israel, characterized at once by flattering speech and murderous intent, the leaders were Balak and Balaam. They were worthy partners in this bloodless, but unholy war. They had fitted themselves for it by a long process of preparatory training. When they seduced Israel, it was not the first time they had united fair speech with a godless purpose.

We see the sinful alliance in Balak, on his first appearance in the story. With the desperation of a cowardly spirit he is determined to destroy Israel. Therefore he sends for Balaam. He cared naught for the false prophet. If Balaam had stood in the way of his wicked life, he would not have hesitated to destroy him. But, because he would accomplish an unholy end, and could use Balaam in doing it, he stops not with any words of flattery. Knowing the character of the man whose help he solicits, his first message magnifies the part which the prophet is to perform in the overthrow of his enemies. Most artfully does he extol the efficacy of Balaam's curses. They are indispensable to his purpose. He must come and bring them with him. "For I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." Balak probably sincerely believed this. But his present expression of his faith was nevertheless, to the last degree, artful and flattering. His heart was bent on a foul crime; and he scruples not to use any instrumentality in order to accomplish it. So, too, in his second embassy to the Seer, still persisting in his diabolical purpose, he would gain his end by magnificent promises to the man whose help he needs. "I will pro-

mote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me." He urgently solicits the prophet's curses upon his enemies by the same kind of indefinite but magnificent allurements. "Am I not able indeed to promote thee to honor?" And, when at last he fails of his purpose, he spurns the intractable tool of his wrath, still artfully pointing the false prophet to the reward, which he was suffering to slip out of his fingers. "I thought to promote thee unto great honor; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honor."

But the king can not compare with the prophet, in the use of fine words, with which to cover a sinful life. It is a notable fact that we have from the lips of Balaam some of the noblest utterances to be found anywhere in the Holy Scriptures. None of God's servants has given us a clearer statement of the unchanging truthfulness of Jehovah, than Balaam gives to the king of Moab, when he says,—"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Nowhere else than in the mouth of Balaam do we find more just and lofty conceptions of the duty of God's messengers. It is the false prophet, who says,—"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I can not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." From him again, comes the word,—"Have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." Still again, with an unclouded view of his duty, he says,—"Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put into my mouth?" And yet,

once more, meeting the remonstrances of the king, he cries,—"I can not go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of my own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak." Nobler utterances than these as to this subject it would be difficult for us to find, even in the Bible. Nor must we forget that it is to Balaam that we owe that well-worded wish, which has been the sincere prayer of multitudes of the pious in all ages,—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." To the prophet of Midian also was vouchsafed that wonderful vision of Messiah's day—a golden link in the chain of Messianic prophecy, that stretches from the garden of Eden to the garden of Calvary,—"I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

It is evident from these quotations, that both the king of Moab and the prophet of Midian were adepts in the use of beautiful words. They could talk smoothly enough. But they were both bad men. Of this there is no manner of doubt. The judgment of the Scriptures upon the character of Balaam especially, is one of unmitigated severity. The lesson of this feature of these two characters is obvious and of great importance. Pious talk and a bad life are perfectly compatible, and their conjunction is by no means of rare occurrence. But wherever they are found together, we shall discover a thoroughly rotten character. When a man can bring himself to veil his real and unholy purposes under the covering of

artful and smooth and flattering words, he has reached the last and awful stage of degeneracy known as hypocrisy, and from which recovery is ever exceedingly improbable.

But hypocrisy is the last step of a downward progress. The degeneracy begins further back. Perhaps one of the first indications of the presence of this spiritual poison is the being satisfied with mere emotion, without any corresponding action—luxuriating in good feelings without any reference to their relations to, or influence upon, good conduct. Following this by slow processes comes the possibility of giving utterance to the finest sentiments in the fairest speech, when the thought expressed takes no hold of the spiritual nature of him who speaks. So, by constant deterioration, we reach at last the low point of the bad king and false prophet, where for a foul end we are willing and deliberately purpose to cloak our aims under the beautiful covering of the fairest words. "In all labor there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury."

Another truth, illustrated and made especially emphatic by this episode in the history of Israel's wanderings, is this—

II.—The Impossibility of Neutrality.

This position of neutrality, as between the service of God on the one hand, and the service of the world on the other, was the attitude which Balaam desired to occupy. From what has been said, it is evident that he was a very gifted man. In mental endowments and spiritual gifts, he was far in advance of his generation. Nor was he destitute of lofty aspirations. He was not

always the prey of evil passions. At times doubtless, in the utterance of his fine sentiments, he was sincere, and mightily swayed in the direction of holiness and goodness. There may have been, in his heart, at all times, a vague and inoperative desire and purpose to do what was right. So, when a definite line of duty was laid before him, from which evil powers were seeking to swerve him, his mind was divided. He wanted to keep on the line, and yet wanted to turn aside.

This is the key to the enigmas of his conduct in relation to the king of Moab. Balaam would serve God, the Jehovah of Israel; but he wanted Balak's money and honors. The narrative makes it perfectly plain that the king understood the man he was dealing with. In his first embassy to seek the help of the prophet, he is careful to send, not only a joint commission of the elders of Moab and Midian, but also with them "the rewards of divination in their hand." It is evident from this that Balaam had made a trade of his endowments, and this fact had become widely known. Extraordinarily gifted with intellectual abilities and foresight, he had acquired, what is far more perilous to any man, a great reputation for sanctity of character and the most intimate relations to Jehovah. For this reason his blessings and curses were so much sought after. He had made a merchandise of his holy things, prostituting his noble gifts to his passion for the gold that perishes. His master sin was covetousness. He loved "the wages of unrighteousness." And this master passion had grown by what it fed on, until it carried him away to the gulf of perdition.

But through all the growth of this devouring sin, as detailed in the sacred story, it is still in Balaam's mind to serve the Lord—if he can do so, and yet not displease Balak. His entire history is an illustration of his fruitless endeavors to accomplish this double end. That history, therefore, is full of inconsistencies and contradictions. We see him loftily refusing, and even contemptuously spurning, the gold of Moab. But all the time his heart is eagerly craving that money; and it is his firm but secret purpose to secure it, at whatever price. It is not necessary for us to believe that Balaam was insincere in rejecting the offered reward, which yet we find that he did afterward actually accept. It explains all the phases of his conduct to suppose that he was powerfully swayed by two opposing principles—the desire to do right, and the love of money.

This instability of his mind, moved hither and thither by these conflicting powers, explains another contradictory phase of his history. Nobody knew more clearly, or ever said more plainly, that Jehovah was an unchangeable God. And yet we see Balaam acting as if he expected, or at least hoped, that God would change His mind, and let him do what he wanted to do, and must do, if he would gain the wealth and honors which he coveted. God had told him, in unmistakable terms, that he should not go with the messengers of Moab. Yet we find him, on the arrival of the second embassy, temporizing and halting. With most emphatic words, he declares he can not, even for a house full of money, go beyond the word of the Lord. And that word he had already received. But immediately after we hear

him asking the ambassadors to wait another night. Perhaps the Lord will, after all, let him do what they desired of him.

The "double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"; and the words explain the conduct of the false prophet. It seemed so right to him, and so desirable to do the will of God, and to have that God for his friend. But, alas! how can he let these riches and honors slip through his fingers! His eyes all the time are on that money. Even the emphasis with which he spurns it shows his love for it. As no man is so willing to swear that he speaks the truth as the habitual and unscrupulous liar, so no one more indignantly spurns the offered bribe than he whose hands are aching to clasp it and carry it away. This was Balaam. Miserable and unhappy man!

How full of warning is his example! He has many followers among men, even in our day. They wish to serve the true God; but they will serve their own gods. The double end they can not attain. The effort is vain. Their lives are bundles of contradictions. They are full of a world of unhappiness. No man can serve two masters. "Ye can not serve God and Mammon." Sooner or later, every man will be found on the one side or the other, with only a life of pain for trying to stride the line between the service of the Lord and the service of the world.

Balaam, like all such double-minded, halting souls, was at last found unmistakably on the wrong side. The story of his connection with the king of Moab traces only the downward progress, for this is the important

thing for us to consider. And the historian enables us to follow the steps by which the unstable prophet went from one low level to another still lower, hastening ever downward with an accelerating rapidity. But the writer does not choose to dwell upon the final and awful catastrophe. Only, as it were incidentally, do we learn that Balaam perished with the enemies of God and Israel.

The effort to be on both sides ended as it always does. The contest in the soul of the prophet of Midian, between truth and conscience on the one side, and the love of money and worldly honors on the other, ended in a victory for the powers of evil. "We can not well suppress a feeling of sadness that one so gifted by nature and so favored of God with prophetic revelations, should, despite of all, have yet succumbed to the dominion of the baser impulses of his soul. His final record is dark and distressing. 'He taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel,' and drew them into idolatry and fornication (Rev. ii. 14, and Num. 25). He cast in his lot with the Midianites, and (apparently) counseled them into the same infernal policy. Hence, when the Lord in self-defence hurled down the sword of His people upon Midian and five of her kings fell, Balaam, the son of Beor, also was slain (Num. xxxi. 1–8). Thus he who so plaintively yet so pertinently prayed, 'Let me die the death of the righteous,' met the death of the wicked. He had seen reason enough for the prayer: 'Let my last end be like his'; and yet he 'died as the fool dieth'—in arms against Almighty God. While in imagination and intellect he might have taken rank with the noblest of earth's sons, yet through the

baseness of his impulses and the greed of a covetous soul, he chose his rank among the meanest, and utterly missed the immortality which seemed at one moment so nearly in his grasp. For a while God held him to the utterance of lofty thought, and apparently of pure and resolute purpose. But no sooner was the Lord's restraining hand lifted off than Balaam slumped into the mire of his selfish, covetous nature, and went fast 'to his own place.'"* He, who for many years would have men think of him as a saint, perished at last among sinners.

Another truth, often overlooked, yet of vast moment, and significantly illustrated in the lives and experiences of Balak and Balaam, is summed up in the words,

III.—Unavailing Spiritual Influences.

Why did not God permit Balaam to comply with Balak's wishes and suffer him to curse Israel? No one can dwell long upon this unique history without confronting this question. The adequate answer to it will probably lead the inquirer farther than he suspects. We can hardly imagine that the prohibition was laid upon the prophet, because his curses would or could have any unfavorable effect upon the children of Israel. God permitted Shimei to curse David. But this was in David's hearing; and the curses of the wicked Benjamite were well calculated to humble the king, and to lead him to recognize, as he did, the hand of God in his afflictions. But the curses of Balaam were to be ut-

* "The Pentateuch," *ut supra*, pages 373–4.

tered afar off, and apparently without being known to those upon whom they were to be pronounced. Of what avail, then, were they? And, even if it became known to the tribes of the Lord that they were resting under the maledictions of the far-famed prophet of Midian, it does not seem probable that they would be very much disturbed by the fact.

If, then, no evil could result to His chosen people from Balaam's curses, why did not the Lord let him curse? Was there any object to be gained, in exerting a Divine restraining power upon the wicked prophet, to cause him to bless rather than to curse? That there was some wise and holy purpose to be accomplished by it we can not doubt. But we may not be able to fathom the depths of that purpose. We are safe, however, in saying, that a large part of the object of this Divine restraint of the prophet must be sought, and will be found, in the natural and probable effect of the prohibition upon the mind of the king of Moab. While we note the manifest guidance of the children of Israel by the Infinite Spirit, we must not overlook the fact that He was working in the hearts of other peoples also. The king of Moab had not yet reached the point already occupied by the accursed Canaanites, when the Spirit of God should finally forsake him and his people. But he was rapidly approaching the limits of the Divine forbearance. It is a well-established fact that God, before He leaves the soul forever, does often, if not usually, concenter many most powerful spiritual influences upon that soul, if at length he may resolve to turn and live.

There is no reason why we may not believe that God

was so dealing with the king of Moab. He was dealing with Balak in the way of enlightenment, while He waited for him, "that He might be gracious unto him"; or, if he persisted in blinding his eyes to the light, that he might be left utterly without excuse. It is not difficult to trace this merciful course of the Divine Spirit in the prohibition laid upon Balaam. Its voice to Balak was something like this,—'You believe in superhuman powers. Therefore you have sent for Balaam to help you by cursing Israel. You know your man, and understand perfectly that he wishes to do as you say, and so secure your reward. And yet he can not curse my people. A Divine power holds him in firm restraint, and he must do as he is bidden to do by a power mightier than his own imperious lusts. Here, then, is a supernatural, superhuman Power; this you know. Will you not bow before it, and cease to war upon the Almighty Jehovah? That Power would bless you. You see how the curses are turned into blessings. Can you be in doubt, then, as to the character of that power which restrains Balaam from executing your cruel behest? It is a benevolent supernatural Power that wishes you well, and would make you the monument of mercy rather than of wrath. Yield to its gracious influence; and, while yet you may, flee from the impending doom.'

We see here, then, a sufficient explanation of what must otherwise appear an undue magnifying of the value and power of a wicked man's curses. The gracious God was *re*straining Balaam, if at length His tender mercy might *con*strain Balak. But the king of Moab set himself against these intimations of Jehovah's will. He

yielded to the bitter and malevolent impulses of his nature, and hardened himself against these manifold Divine influences. Three times he saw the clearest tokens of the presence of a benign spiritual power moving upon the prophet. But there is no softening of his heart under that gracious manifestation. On the contrary, he repeatedly blinded himself to the truth and fortified himself in his rebellion. His bitter disappointment, and the intensity with which his anger at last blazes forth even against Balaam, show that he is now ripe for destruction. His case is but one of many illustrations of the working of unavailing spiritual influences.

The student of the Gospel history will have no difficulty in tracing the parallel, in this particular, between Balak and Judas. Again and again does our Lord so speak in the presence of the traitor, as we might suppose would have turned him from his unholy purpose. With solemn words of warning, marked by both plainness and sternness, He tells the hardening Apostle of his character and impending doom. With words of infinite compassion He shows Himself ready to welcome and save even the betrayer. But it is all without avail. Under the blazing light of the words and work of the Son of God Judas hardened himself in his iniquity, and at last, with an awful abandon, hurried from the hallowed scenes of the Last Supper into the outer darkness, and thence speedily to "his own place."

God was dealing with Balaam also, with spiritual forces that proved unavailing. The Divine procedure, in the case of the prophet, however, was after a different

manner. God was dealing with a different kind of a man —one perhaps just as bad as the king of Moab, but one in whom wickedness took on a different character. God deals honestly with the honest; but He leaves the insincere to "eat of the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices." His method with Balaam was after the description of the Psalmist, who thus portrays God's way of dealing with men,—"With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." The false prophet dealt deceitfully with God, and God dealt deceitfully with him, in the sense that He suffered him to be misguided and finally destroyed by his own deceitfulness. At first, He told him plainly that he should not go with the messengers of the king of Moab. But when, at length, instead of a frank and implicit obedience, Balaam acted out his desire to see the will of God in another light more pleasing to himself, God permitted him to have his own way. God left him to feel that he was Divinely guided, when, as a matter of fact, he was led by "his own cupidity and intense and overmastering covetousness." But did not God permit Balaam ultimately to go with Balak's messengers? He permitted it, purposing in the permission to test and disclose the true character of Balaam. But the mind of God was unquestionably that the prophet should not have anything to do with the solicitations of the king.

So, in all the subsequent scenes of this story, it is evident that God is dealing with a deceitful and insincere

man in such a way that he need not go astray, if he wishes to do right, and yet shall not be compelled against his will to refrain from doing wrong. The suggestive fact, then, in the experiences of both Balak and Balaam, is that here there were spiritual influences thrown around them, sufficient to have guided them aright and saved them, if only they had been responsive to their power.

God still deals with men after the same manner. The common, and, as we say, ineffectual operations of the Spirit of God are much more widely extended than perhaps we imagine. That they do prove unavailing is painfully evident in the case of multitudes. That they are sufficient to lead them on in the path of light, and, if responded to in the spirit of loving and teachable obedience, to bring them to salvation, we are authorized by the examples of the Scriptures to believe. But, on the other hand, if these beginnings of the work of spiritual forces in the heart and life are resisted and quenched, the soul becomes hardened by that which has a gracious tendency, and the impenitent and obdurate spirit perishes without hope. From the whole character of God's dealings with such men, after it may be the lapse of years, it becomes painfully, but unmistakably evident, that, in His infinite compassions, the Lord would; but they would not.

In explanation of this mournful result, we must consider another truth illustrated, with unusual clearness, in this brief story, viz.:

IV.—Searing the Conscience.

The sacred writer, in a few brief touches, shows us this process of moral insensibility going on in the heart of both the king of Moab and the prophet of Midian. We see the work of hardening at different stages of advancement in the two men; but it is the same terrible work of searing the conscience in both—through stubborn irresponsiveness and disobedience causing the moral nature to become more and more callous, and insensible alike to every holy impression and every noble impulse.

Let us see how this searing of the conscience shows itself in the case of the king. After repeated endeavors and failures to get from the prophet the curses he wants, Balak is unwilling to hear any more. So long as he believed the superhuman forces, which he thought were at the command of Balaam, could be enlisted on his side, he is ready to hear and obey. But so soon as he becomes satisfied that these powers are against him, he wants to be done with them. So he stops the prophecies of the Midianite Seer with his imperious command, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all." God, as we have seen, was dealing with him in the way of enlightenment, if peradventure he might be persuaded to cease his causeless opposition to Israel. But he was a worshiper of the power of money. And in this particular instance he was encouraged in his idolatry by the well-known venality of Balaam. He sought, therefore, to purchase with gold the help of spiritual powers in his wicked war on the children of Israel. In this he failed.

When his failure became evident even to his obdurate

vision, instead of being humbled and brought to repentance of his sin, he blinds his eyes to the gracious character of the power whose help he can not secure, and refuses to see in it a message of mercy to his own soul. When he can not get what he wants, he wants to silence the oracle. God's light he turns into darkness. When strains of blessing, instead of twanging curses, come from the minstrel's harp, he puts his fingers in his ears. Sweet melodies he will not hear.

How many of us are like the king of Moab! So long as we can dwell upon promises, and cherish the hope of gaining something from the hand of God, we do not neglect going to Him; and we are specially attentive to His voice in the Word, and in our secret souls. But when it becomes plain that God has a message of severity for us, and of threatening for our sins, we are ready to shut our eyes and ears. We are no longer willing to see and hear. God sends us light; but the light is not what we want. And so we shut it out; or allow it to reach us only through such a distorted medium that it becomes a curse rather than a blessing. The oracle must speak the message we wish to hear; or we abandon at once the sacred shrine, and bow henceforth before another god.

In Balaam we have a double illustration of this tampering with the moral nature and the voice of conscience. The prophet enters upon this dangerous course, first, in seeking to have his duty altered. Balaam goes to God for direction. Was this wrong? In many circumstances, so far from being a sin, it is just what we ought to do, and are commanded to do. When we are

in doubt about the path of duty especially, it is our unquestionable privilege to ask God to show us the way. But this was not the case of the prophet. He knew perfectly what he ought to do. The will of God as to his relations to the messengers of Balak, the prophet knew very well. The Lord had told him expressly,—"Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed." And yet, instead of that sincere and single-hearted obedience to the will of God, which we might have looked for, we find Balaam acting as if he thought the Lord would change His mind, and let him do what he so much wanted to do.

Alas! how many of us are like Balaam! We go to God, not to learn what our duty is, but to get it changed. As to the duty itself there is no manner of doubt in our minds; and indeed often there can not be. But the duty is distasteful to us. We dwell upon its unpleasant features. We try to see them not only unpleasant, but improper; and as the final result of our reflections, we come to think that it is not our duty at all, and that we were mistaken. So, for want of singleness of purpose to do what the Lord says, we come to be in doubt as to what the Lord actually does say. Second thoughts are not always best. The impulse to duty that comes first especially is generally the best. To hesitate and question here is almost always to go wrong. When God sees in us no heart to do His will, and a desire to do something else, He usually leaves us as He left Balaam, to carry out our own wishes, while continually we become more and more befogged as to what is right and true, until at last even our own consciences lead us astray.

This is the second stage of moral degeneracy, illustrated by the conduct of Balaam. He blinds himself. He will not do what he knows to be wrong; but he will nevertheless do what he wants to do, because he will first bring himself to believe that it is right. We have in Balaam, therefore, what at first thought seems to be an anomaly and contradiction. He is a man of perfect veracity, and yet of utter and unscrupulous untruthfulness. Going to the king of Moab, to declare to him and his people the will of God, he doubtless sincerely resolves that he will not say what he knows is not true; but under the dominance of his covetousness he purposes to try to see that to be true which is really and in every particular false.

Here also Balaam does not stand alone. Multitudes of men go astray, not because they did not know the right way, but because they have so blinded their moral eyesight, that they can no longer distinguish the right from the wrong path. Of these it is that the proverb speaks,—"There is a way that seemeth right to a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." For example, there are some men engaged in the sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage, who, we are persuaded, could never have brought themselves to enter or continue in such a business, except through a blinding process—by which they have persuaded themselves it is not so bad as they at one time believed it to be. Oppressive landlords also blind themselves to the iniquities of the management of their properties, by committing the care of them to other men. And indeed, there is no more common way of blinding the moral sensibilities than in the

use of middle-men and agents. When one does not with his own eyes confront the iniquitous practices of his profession or business or trade, it is much easier for him to persuade himself that wrong is right, and that the way of death is the path of life.

The inevitable result of this blinding process is the utter destruction of the moral nature, so far as possessing any power of control or guidance is concerned. Moral distinctions are confused. Right is wrong; and wrong is right. The soul feels Divinely guided, when in reality it is driven by the force of its own imperious lusts. The light is no longer sought or recognized. As in the progress of disease in the eye, there comes a time when the sun is intolerable, so it is here. The light itself blinds. That which was sent to glorify the way, casts a deeper darkness on the path; and so men stumble and fall.

It was so with both Balak and Balaam. Both, hardening themselves in impenitency, go out into the darkness, in the midst of the growing, glorious light. With His final power the Spirit of inspiration led the prophet to sing of the rising Star of Jacob, hence ages onward to be seen and followed by the wise men of the east to the cradle of the infant Redeemer. By the same Divine compulsion he celebrated the power of the Sceptre which should rise out of Israel, pointing forward to David, the first conqueror of Moab, and through David onward to David's greater Son, Messiah the Conqueror of the nations. It was a grand song. The king of Moab heard unwilling and impatient. And though a blaze of light from the throne of the God of Israel fell

all around the prophet and the king, its only effect was to harden their hearts as the nether mill-stone. Light in glorious effulgence was there; but they had reached the point where the more light the more blindness and darkness covered their souls and their ways. In that chosen darkness they perished.

"A Star shall break through yonder skies
And beam on every nation's sight;
From yonder ranks a Sceptre rise
And bow the nations to its might:
I see their glorious strength afar—
All hail, mild Sceptre! hail, bright Star!

"And who am I, for whom is flung
Aside the shrouding veil of time?
The Seer, whose rebel soul is wrung
By wrath and prophecy and crime;
The future as the past I see—
Woe, then, for Moab! woe for me!"

V.

CALEB AND JOSHUA.

CALEB and Joshua appear in the Sacred History in marked contrast with Balak and Balaam. The latter were notorious examples of blind unbelief and disobedience. The men whose characters we are now to examine, were pre-eminent illustrations of just the opposite qualities. More than any of the men of their generation they believed and obeyed God. In an illustrious sense they were

Heroes of Faith.

And no other theme is so appropriately emphasized by the study of their conduct and in the comparison of their characters. In the progress of events Joshua rises far above the companion of his earlier experiences; but our every view of Caleb shows him a man of such faith as is no more than paralleled in the life of his illustrious friend and leader. In a quieter life and less prominent place, he always appears imbued with the same lofty principle that distinguishes the character and life of Joshua. Of this we shall see more than one illustration.

This faith of Caleb, we shall feel, is all the more remarkable when we have noted some suggestive, though

perhaps not decisive, intimations of the Sacred Narrative as to his birth and parentage. Who was Caleb? In answering this question we find that, in the genealogical tables of the Chronicles, Caleb is enrolled (in a somewhat peculiar way, it is true) in the tribe of Judah. So, also, in the account of the appointment of the spies, in naming the men and the tribes they represented, it is said, "Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb, the son of Jephunneh." It would seem from these passages that there can hardly be a doubt that Caleb belonged to the tribe of Judah. Other passages, however, make it doubtful whether, though he belonged to Judah, his place in that tribe was by right of birth. In Joshua, for example (xv. 13), it is said, "And unto Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, he gave a part *among the children of Judah*." The words seem to imply that, though Caleb was not of Judah, he was yet numbered among the children of Judah. Again, in another passage (Joshua xiv. 14), he is called "Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the *Kenezite*." Now we learn, from other places (Genesis xxxvi. 15 and 42; also 1 Chronicles i. 53), that the Kenezites were a tribe of Edom, the descendants of Kenaz, the grandson of Esau. Again, in the passage last cited from Joshua (xiv. 14) it is said Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb, "because that he wholly followed the *Lord God of Israel*"—the implication being that he might have been expected to do otherwise, and to follow some other god. That Caleb, then, was a foreigner—a descendant of Esau—is extremely probable. This supposition is very much strengthened by the occurrence of Edomitish names in his family. Compare 1 Chronicles ii. 50–52, with Gene-

sis xxxvi. 20–23.* "It becomes, therefore, quite possible that Caleb was a foreigner by birth; a proselyte incorporated into the tribe of Judah, into which perhaps he or his ancestors had married, and one of the first-fruits of that Gentile harvest of which Jethro, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, and many others, were samples and signs." He was an Israelite, though not of Israel.

We turn now to Joshua. He was an Israelite by birth, of the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chron. vii. 27). He was born about the time Moses fled from Egypt to sojourn in the land of Midian. He was, therefore, a little over forty years of age at the time of the Exodus. He was a born warrior. Moses seems early to have noticed his pre-eminent fitness to be a military commander. He comes to the front first in the fight with Amalek in Rephidim, where Joshua led the hosts of Israel in their first battle, while Moses, sustained by Aaron and Hur, made intercession for his people on the top of the hill (Exodus xvii. 8–16). Other notices of the future commander, previous to his selection as one of the spies, are very brief, but significant. Moses had him for his minister when he first went up into the holy mount. He probably went part way with Moses, and there waited for him (Exodus xxiv. 13). It was Joshua who first met the dismissed and troubled mediator, as he came by Divine direction down from the sacred summit. Together they drew near the camp of the revelling host, and to Joshua's military ear it seemed as if there was war in the camp. Moses recognized the unwonted sounds as those

* See other references in Smith's Bible Dictionary, sub voce Caleb.

of feasting and song (Exodus xxxii. 17, 18). In the subsequent solemn work of intercession, judgment, and punishment, Joshua went with Moses into the tabernacle, and there remained while his beloved leader went forth to plead with God and Israel (Exodus xxxiii. 11). Sharing in such scenes and duties, we are not surprised to find him among the twelve men appointed to spy out the land of Canaan. Nor do we wonder that Moses, when warned by the Lord of his approaching end, besought Jehovah for the appointment of a successor, and received the answer of his prayer in the direction to set apart Joshua to this sacred work. His character and training fitted him, in an unusual measure, to take up the work of his failing chief and lead Israel into the promised land. According to Josephus, Joshua was eighty-five years old when he crossed the Jordan. With this accords the age of Caleb, who was forty years old when sent on the mission of the spies, and forty-five years afterward received his inheritance from the hand of Israel's leader.

The two men are now before us. Let us study the few suggestive scenes in their lives in illustration of the theme already announced. We have here,

I.—Faith removing Mountains.

The mission of the spies was a singular episode in the wilderness wanderings. It is a much more suggestive story than it perhaps appears to be to the superficial reader. We have two accounts of the origin of the proposition to send the men to spy out the land. The first one is in Num. xiii. 1, 2,—"And the Lord spake

unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel." In his rehearsal of the history nearly forty years later, Moses gives another account of the business. He says (Deut. i. 20–23), after reminding them how the Lord had led them,—"And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come." The two accounts do not seem to harmonize; but the discrepancy admits of an easy and significant explanation. The rehearsal of the history by Moses is more detailed, and is undoubtedly to be taken as supplementary to the earlier account. It is a parallel case with the mission of Balaam to the king of Moab. The Divine direction to the false prophet to go with the messengers of Balak was permissive, not mandatory. God said, Go, to a man, who, He saw, was bent on having his own way; but His original command was that he should stay. In like manner, in the matter of sending the spies, God permitted the children of Israel to do what they themselves desired and first proposed to do; but that proposition was a departure from, and inconsistent with, the plan of giving them their inheritance through the simple exercise of faith in the Divine Power which had led them hitherto. The sending of the spies, therefore, was through Divine permission, but not by Divine command. Both narratives, therefore, are true, and consistent with each other.

Further reflection upon the matter will convince us that the first conception of the idea of sending the spies

could have arisen only from unbelief and fear. We find this vaguely hinted at in the narrative. The people had just come through that "great and terrible wilderness," and were now on the southern borders of Canaan. They were weary of the way. We may well believe also that, as they approached the land of their enemies, they began to hear reports of their greatness and power. These filled them with dismay. Moses finds it necessary to encourage them. This he does by reminding them of the manifest Divine leadership through which they had been brought so far on their journey, and closes his address with the words, which seem to have no little significance in illustration of their state of mind, "Fear not, neither be discouraged." The bold words of their leader did not rally their faith. They still borrowed trouble of their fears. They determined to verify or prove false the reports of the power of their enemies. And they seemed to believe that the mission of the spies would verify those reports. But they knew that Moses would not countenance them in anything that would confirm their fears or unbelief; and so they put it on the ground of military expediency. "They shall search out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come." But the other account makes it evident that they wanted light particularly upon the subjects respecting which they were full of fears. Among other things, they were to "go up into the mountain, and see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities

they be that they dwell in, whether in tents or in strongholds."

It is evident that, to a people who sincerely and implicitly trusted in God, and sought only to walk in the path of single-hearted obedience, these were matters of no consequence whatever. The language of faith would have been, "It is nothing to the Lord to save by many or by few." "If the Lord be for us who can be against us?" "Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world." But Israel were a people of little faith. The entire business of the mission of the spies was born of unbelief. For wise purposes God permitted it. He saw the people bent on this method of procedure. They were unanimous about it. "And ye came near unto me every one of you," says Moses, referring probably to the heads of the tribes. And so the Lord commanded Moses to do as the people wished, and directed him to send the spies to search out the land.

It seemed needful to obtain an accurate understanding of the spirit of this mission of the spies, in order to appreciate the circumstances of their return, and especially the heroic faith of Caleb and Joshua. After forty days the men came back with their report. It is to be remembered that they reported to the same people by whom they had been sent forth—as doubting and distrustful as they were six weeks before. The spies were divided. A majority and a minority report was laid before the unbelieving congregation. It is, now, a notable circumstance that, as to all matters of fact, the two reports did not greatly differ. Both agreed as to the extraordinary fruitfulness of the land: "It was a land

flowing with milk and honey." Both agreed as to the fact that the inhabitants of the land were powerful, and that the giants were there. The report of the minority emphasized the fruitfulness of the land, and slurred the presence of the Anakim. The majority report enlarged upon the power of their enemies, and the strength of their cities. Confirming thus the fears of the people, and perhaps encouraged by their ready credence of their story, they at last went further, and contradicted themselves as to the fruitfulness of Canaan. Urged on by the unbelieving auditors before them, perhaps, they are now prepared to say even of the land, "It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof." At any rate, this is plainly an afterthought; and it does not, of course, accord with what they had just reported about the strength of the inhabitants, their stature and their power.

The reports, then, so far as they are confined to facts, are substantially alike. It is chiefly the comments of the spies upon their reports that differ, these being colored by their faith or unbelief. The ten say, the land is fruitful, but our enemies are mighty. The two admit the presence of the giants, but see them and all others defenceless because forsaken of God. The ten took no account of God, and therefore thought that nothing could be done. The two, who felt that God was on their side, thought the conquest of Canaan would be an easy matter.

Here we see a picture of faith and unbelief. And emphatically we see here faith removing mountains of difficulty from the way. The unbelieving host had given up the sheet-anchor of faith, when they proposed no

longer to walk by faith, but by sight, and so would have some report of the land. And now they seem to be anticipating just such tidings; and when the report of the ten is made, it bears to their doubting minds the stamp of truth. It is to them according to their faith, or, rather, want of faith. They see lions in the way. Difficulties lie thick and mighty before them; and they are full of murmuring and even rebellion against God and Moses.

But Caleb and Joshua, planting themselves upon the firm foundation of unvarnished truth, hold as firmly to their faith in God, who had never yet forsaken them. They thought of the difficulties suggested by their companions; but they immediately thought of God, and those difficulties immediately vanished. Caleb here stood forward as the spokesman of their side; and his brave words are full of good cheer,—"Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it." And as the murmuring host lifted up their voices against their leaders, and were carrying their rebellion so far as to consider the question of returning to Egypt, the faithful spies rent their garments and besought the people to return to the path of faith and obedience. With importunate persuasiveness they exhorted them, realizing as they did that a crisis had come in the history of their brethren. "The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us; only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us; their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us:

fear them not." But it was of no avail. To the doubting host the obstacles were insurmountable; they refused to believe, and were about to stone the faithful messengers. Such is ever the character of unbelief; it refuses the light, and would destroy the messengers who bring it to its door. But to such faith as was cherished by Caleb and Joshua, every valley is exalted and every mountain is brought low. Again, we have here,

II.—Faith Conquering Enemies.

In the mission of the spies—certainly in making their report, and in the subsequent endeavors of the two faithful men to secure a right decision of the people on the same—Caleb seems to have been more prominent than Joshua. We infer this from the fact that to him is given a special promise of inheritance in Canaan, because of his fidelity. Joshua shares the assurance given to his companion of entrance into the promised land; but there is no such explicit mention of his inheritance as there is of Caleb's future possession. In the war of the conquest, the relative positions of the two men are reversed. Joshua now towers far above his companion, and indeed above all his contemporaries. By Divine appointment he now occupies the position for which by natural and acquired abilities he is peculiarly fitted. From the time of the Exodus he had been a soldier. He had been a favorite and diligent pupil of the great Commander of Israel, whose military knowledge had been acquired among the Egyptians, and was hardly less conspicuous than his legal lore. It was Joshua who led Israel in their first contest with Amalek in the vale of

Rephidim. His soldierly instincts appear in his explanation of the noise which came up to Moses and himself, descending from the holy mount, from the revellers in the idolatrous camp. And doubtless more and more in the progress of the weary years of the wandering he became known as a military leader; and so, when the work of Moses was done, he stepped into the place of Commander—by God's ordination made the captain of salvation to bring his people into their promised rest.

In this, the great work of his life, Joshua was, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews intimates (iv. 8), a type of Christ, the great Captain of our Salvation. The typical resemblances are very plain. First, the name common to both—Joshua and Jesus, of course, being the same word. Secondly, Joshua leads Israel into Canaan, and assigns them their respective inheritances; so Jesus brings His people into heaven, and gives them there their safe and eternal dwelling-place. Thirdly, Joshua succeeded Moses, and completed his work; so Christ with His blessed Gospel follows the law, and completes the work of that law in the perfect salvation of him who believeth.

During all the period of the conquest, therefore, Joshua deservedly stood first. But we may well believe that Caleb was also in the midst of the believing, fighting host, and that his confident heroism did not a little to animate and encourage the children of Israel in the arduous war. His place had been given him among the children of Judah, the largest of the twelve tribes. Judah was the leader of the strongest of the four army corps, into which the host had been divided; and of this

corps Nahshon was commander. Caleb, therefore, must have occupied some subordinate position. He had shown himself able to discharge a leading part with fidelity; and now his faith manifests its Divine character in his willingness to do also any subordinate work. He was doubtless now, as he had been forty years before, for the immediate conquest of the land. And he would do anything and take any part to accomplish the blessed result.

Without, then, losing sight of our heroes, but with a more general view, we see here, for one thing, faith tried by long delay. After the sight which Caleb and Joshua had had of the land of promise, it must have been a sore trial to them to be compelled to spend nearly forty years in the wilderness. They were in no respect to blame for the unbelief of the people, so far as we know. They had made most strenuous efforts to lead their brethren to trust God and go forward. But when it became apparent that the people were unequal to the situation, and the sentence of exclusion had been pronounced upon them for their unbelief, the faithful ones must have felt the trial most keenly. There were indeed but four of these — men that were men when they left Egypt; and of these four, two should subsequently fail. Who can tell how Caleb and Joshua must have felt, as they saw the near vision of their inheritance fade from view, and they realized that only in their old age could they expect to enjoy the land, which to them was "the glory of all lands"? Thus was their faith tried and made perfect for the great work before them.

Again, for another thing, we see here faith trained to

implicit trust and thorough consecration. This seems to have been the double lesson of the two conflicts, in which the children of Israel were first engaged in the land of Canaan. The fall of Jericho was accomplished in such a way, as could not but teach Israel that this was to be a peculiar war. It was to be a conflict, in which far more depended upon the faith of God's people than upon the strength of their armies, or the military skill of their leader. They were now to be taught, on the threshold of their inheritance, to exercise that faith to which they had been summoned by forty years of painful experience in the desert. In like manner, their first defeat before Ai, though their losses were small, was eminently fitted to sound the loudest call to a whole-hearted devotion and obedience. They could not hope to overcome their enemies, unless they gave themselves to God in a consecration which should be without reserve, and an obedience which should be both absolute and unquestioning.

Still again, for another thing, we see here faith exercising a wise discretion in the conduct of the war. The lesson of Jericho and Ai was not lost upon Joshua and his people. They now believed great things of God; and they immediately began to undertake great things for God. And God gave them the opportunity, as He always does, for the exercise of both faith and devotion. The commander of the faithful wisely did not fritter away his strength in minor conflicts. He sought, what the providence of God brought to his hand, to meet the enemy in his strongholds and in the full strength of his power. A few great victories would break that power

forever, and render all subsequent work comparatively easy. This was Joshua's plan; and for the accomplishment of it he and his people had now abundant faith. The battles of Beth-Horon and Merom were the great battles of the conquest. They practically settled the question of the possession of the land of Palestine. We can hardly suppress our wonder that a people that were so lately so unbelieving, and to whom the difficulties of the conquest seemed insurmountable, should now exhibit such undaunted courage and such unwavering faith.

One other view we must glance at in these scenes of the conquest. We see faith loitering in the completion of the work. Perhaps we should say it was unbelief that led to their halting. But there is some reason to believe that the cessation of the conflict arose from an overweening confidence that now, all the greater work being done, it would not be difficult to accomplish all that remained; and for this therefore there was no great haste. So they proceed to divide the land and to claim their inheritances, leaving to each tribe the work of finally exterminating the small remnants of their enemies that might yet be found within their several borders. The subsequent history is full of illustrations of the folly of this excessive confidence and security. It was a course highly offensive to God; and it involved them in troubles, from the full effects of which they did not recover for well-nigh five hundred years, if indeed they ever entirely escaped their baleful influences. Until the days of David, at any rate, they were annoyed by their unsubjected foes.

We come now to the final lesson, illustrated by these heroes of faith. We have here—

III.—Faith Claiming Promises.

The land was not thoroughly subdued. The strongholds were still in possession of the enemy. Whoever may have been at fault for this incomplete work of the conquest, it was not Joshua. He was now over ninety years of age; and could well excuse himself from the arduous work of war. But he did not fail to exhort the people to go on and finish the subjugation of the entire country. "How long," he says, "are ye slack to go to possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?" His own personal work, however, in the contest was now done. It remained for him only to divide the inheritance among the tribes according to the Divine will.

In this we have a marvellous exhibition of the great commander's faith. That faith grasped the promise of Israel's inheritance; and, though they were not yet in possession, he parcelled it all out to the various tribes, in the confident assurance that God would give them full possession, whenever their faith should claim it. And this was the actual result. But what an exhibition of faith is here! Calmly and confidently the old soldier divides the land—the unsubjugated portions and even the strongholds and fastnesses of the enemy, as well as the parts from which the Canaanites had been exterminated. History is full of instances of military commanders dividing up the territories which they have acquired by the force of arms; but illustrations are few of con-

querors parcelling out the realms of foes not yet subdued, to the followers through whom they expect to gain full control. But this was Joshua's act. Without hesitation he gave to the tribes of Israel their allotted places, and believed that their God would in due time confirm His own lot.

Caleb's faith was equally conspicuous in the part which he performed in this singular transaction. His course was that of a believing man, who rested firmly on God's promises. In three particulars this is conspicuous, and worthy our attention. First, his long waiting was characterized, not by sullen submission to the inevitable, but by a patient cheerfulness in God's service. The weary years of desert life, while they wandered and awaited the death of the last of the unbelieving and rebellious generation, were doubtless sad and saddening years. We can not resist the temptation to speculate upon the feelings of the host of Israel, while they waited for that last man to die. To the person himself it must have been a solemn thought that he alone now stood in the way of Israel's entrance into the promised land. And to all, both of the doomed and rising generation, it was no doubt a time of sorrow, to which the "Prayer of Moses the man of God" gives unexaggerated expression. But through all the trials of that mournful period, Caleb seems to have maintained a cheerful confidence in God. At the close of the conquest, he refers to that sad period, and to the goodness of God in keeping him alive and in the fulness of his strength, so that now, though fourscore and five years old, he was still in the maturity of his powers. "I am this day fourscore and

five years old: as yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in." We can not doubt that, under all the depressing circumstances of the wandering, it was his unshaken faith in God and His promises that had done so much to preserve him.

Secondly, his reminder of God's promise is bold, frank, and seasonable. He had been in no haste to claim the fulfilment of God's gracious word granted him forty and five years before. But now, when the time has come, and the tribes are being located by lot, and other men are receiving their inheritances, he does not hesitate to come forward and remind his old companion and commander of what the Lord had said in the long gone years. Moses, the servant of the Lord, had sworn, "Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance and thy children's forever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord thy God." The captain of the host recognized the claim of faith, and they gave to the faithful spy the hill country in the vicinity of Hebron. The city itself was allotted to the children of Levi; and, indeed, it had not been promised to Caleb, inasmuch as, doubtless, in their searching of the land his feet had not trodden the streets of the city itself. "And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, Hebron for an inheritance." The whole course of Caleb in this business emphasizes the truth, that it is no sin to claim all God promises to us. That human nature asserted itself in the division of the land we may well believe; and that there was much

dissatisfaction, and perhaps murmuring, we may be quite sure; while the occasion furnished abundant opportunity for the display of selfishness. But in the midst of it all, the simple-minded and trusting Caleb stood forward to claim his own, and grounded his claim upon the sure foundation of God's promises, which can never be broken or forgotten. Would that our faith had the courage to brave all misunderstandings of a selfish world, and the strength to grasp the fulness of the promises, and to claim all that God has said should be ours.

Thirdly, his readiness to take what God promised, with all possible drawbacks, is a notable fact. In Caleb's report long years ago, his faith had made no account of the giants that were in the land. And now, when the Divine lot assigns to him the very stronghold of the Anakim, his faith does not shrink from its hard condition. "Now, therefore," he says, "give me this mountain whereof the Lord spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said." This was the triumph of his faith. He had belittled the opposition of the giants when reporting to his brethren; and his faith rises to the emergency now, when, after so long a time, he finds himself commissioned to gain his inheritance by driving them from their seat of power. With the help of the Lord he believes himself now able to gain the full possession of his inheritance,—the inheritance promised him by a faithful God far back yonder in the desert of Kadesh-Barnea.

This is true faith. A cheerful readiness to await God's own time for the bestowment of the blessing,—the confident claiming of all the Lord has promised, and in proper season,—and a perfect willingness to receive the Divine blessing with all the Divinely appointed conditions; this marks the faith of the believer as genuine. The last feature is far less common than the second, or even than the first. Multitudes would have the promises, but shrink from the Divinely allotted conditions. For example, nothing is more certain than that God makes Himself specially known in the ministry of affliction. How common the desire for this fuller and richer experience of God's grace among those who yet can not honestly sing,

> "E'en though it be a cross
> That raiseth me
> Nearer, my God, to Thee."

How certain it is that the grace of faith can grow only by exercise; and, therefore, how wise in God to put us in positions of trial and difficulty which shall develop this faith! And yet how many long for the faith, and mourn because their faith is so weak, to whom the conditions upon which alone it can become stronger seem so hard that they can not endure them!

Let us emphasize this final truth. All the blessings of the kingdom of heaven are within the reach of faith; but they can be obtained only by that faith that shrinks not from the Divinely appointed conditions, upon which alone they can be possessed in all their fulness.

VI.

ORPAH AND RUTH.

THE careful observer in any great art gallery will not fail to find out and study some of the smaller paintings in the magnificent collection. Overshadowed, to the superficial eye, by larger and grander works, they are none the less gems of art,—original and suggestive in conception, and finished in execution. They adorn and beautify the gallery, of which they form a seemingly unimportant part. Like them is the Book of Ruth, in the canon of Scripture. A little painting, it hangs upon the walls, where range the master works of the master men of a thousand years. Their hearts were fired and their hands were guided by the Inspiring Spirit; but they did no more beauteous and finished work than the author of these four chapters, whose name, lost in the perfection of his picture, has perished from the memory of men.

The story is one of beautiful simplicity, and yet of great power. It stirs the deepest feelings of our nature. The brief language of the record is exceedingly suggestive. Its first sentence transports us into the midst of oriental scenes and ancient times. The hand of God is upon Israel because of their sins; and a famine prevails

throughout the land that was usually "a land flowing with milk and honey." A certain man of Bethlehem of Judea, pressed with necessity on account of the scarcity of food, went over into the land of Moab, to sojourn there, with his wife and two sons.

In process of time the young men are married, each to a woman of Moab. Another revolution of the wheel of God's providence reveals a stricken household. The man and his two sons are dead. The desolate woman, bereft and lonely, turns immediately to the people and land and God of her fathers. She resolves to go back to her native place, even though she must return, no longer Naomi, or pleasant, but Mara, or bitter, because "the Almighty had dealt very bitterly with her."

The young women, her daughters-in-law, were very tenderly attached to Naomi. A community of joys and the common overwhelming sorrows of widowhood, had bound them together as only joy and sorrow mingled can bind. They resolve, therefore, to go with their mother-in-law to the land of Judah. Naomi was doubtless gratified by this exhibition of devotion to one from whom they could hope to receive nothing. But she greatly desired them to make the choice of their further lot in life intelligently; and, therefore, she set before them the difficulties and hardships, which she had reason to believe were in store for them, in leaving the land of Moab. Having painted in strong colors these troubles, and probably caring too much and too exclusively for their temporal prosperity, she urged them to go back and remain with their own people. Naomi may have dissuaded them from going with her, purposing only in

this way to test the real character of their decision. The result shows the accomplishment of her purpose, and that the two young women were actuated by altogether different feelings in their first-formed intention to go with Naomi. Orpah, we are told, "kissed her mother-in-law," evidently in token of farewell, and went back "unto her people and unto her gods." But Ruth clave unto her, declaring her unalterable resolution, in words which have embalmed forever in their sweet tones the memory of her constancy and devotion. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

Let us now give attention to the character and conduct of these two young women, as illustrating the choice, which all of us are justly expected to make in spiritual things. It will be interesting for us to examine,

I.—The Choice of Orpah.

The return to the land of Israel seems to have been already begun. A part, perhaps as much as a day's journey, may have been accomplished before Naomi thought it wise to test the fidelity of her younger companions. They had now experienced some of the pains of parting from their friends, and some of the difficulties they were likely to encounter on the way. It may have been the fact that, during this preliminary stage of the journey, Naomi had noticed some signs of halting on

the part of the one who eventually "went back," that determined her to give her daughters-in-law another opportunity to sound their hearts anew and to choose again whether they would go or stay. The narrative implies that this was done after they had gone some portion of the way.

1. It is a notable fact, then, that Orpah did go a certain distance in that journey to Canaan. It is not probable, indeed, that this has any special significance. It was doubtless the result of her personal attachment to Naomi and to her sister. And yet it must strike every one that herein is a suggestive illustration of the course of multitudes in our day in their relations to heavenly things. Led, it may be, only by their attachment to the people of God, whom they number among their friends, they do go some distance in the journey to the heavenly Canaan. They become somewhat interested in the subject of religion. They appreciate the loveliness of the Christian character. They wish that character was their own. They pray for the graces of the Divine life in secret. And often in the house of God, as also in other places, their slumbering desires are, in a measure, quickened after spiritual things. But they go no further. After some more intimate knowledge of the character of the Christian life, and some superficial trial of its difficulties, they are brought to the point of decision. But they never come to a decision; or, rather, they do decide, but decide against Christ, and to go back again to their sins.

2. Another reflection, suggested by this scene, is, that from this point of decision there is a rapid development

of one's peculiarly distinctive character. Before the final separation of this little company, there was not much to distinguish the one woman from the other. They had both enjoyed the pleasures of married life. They had both passed through the deep waters of a very sore affliction. And their love to a godly mother-in-law was apparently alike sincere and earnest. But, just so soon as this decision is made, the divergence of character becomes manifest. Orpah chooses the world; and her spirit is shown to be essentially worldly,—as will more clearly appear further on. But Ruth chooses the people and land of the true God; and her choice reveals a latent, yet easily discoverable, reference to "the things which are spiritual and eternal."

Here, also, the experience of men repeats itself. The precise point here made must be noted. It is not that the motive of this choice is a love of things temporal,—though this is eminently true (and it forms another link in the chain of instruction to be derived from this history); but it is that the decision, having been reached, rapidly develops a character corresponding with it, whatever it may be. Into a discussion of the reasons for this we can not here enter. It is of the utmost importance that our attention be concentered upon the fact and its consequences. You decide in favor of earthly things; and that decision will carry you forward to a greater degree of earthliness than you have yet reached, and with an increasing celerity. But choose Christ and the interests of His kingdom, and that choice must of necessity send you on, in a spiritual life, with an accelerating rapidity.

The consequences of such a choice as Orpah made, are seen in the alarming growth of the difficulties and improbabilities of salvation. Orpah, on that memorable day, touched more nearly the line of salvation, we have reason to believe, than she ever did afterward. She saw increasing difficulties in the way to the land of Israel. But a more careful study of her character will reveal an amazingly rapid development of overwhelming difficulties in her own heart, such as would forever prevent her from sharing the inheritance and hopes of Israel. It may be so with some one whose eyes rest upon this page. The orbit of your life sometimes brings you to the very verge of the way of salvation. But from that point it turns off: and you go evermore wandering, like a lost star, in the infinite realm of a lost eternity.

3. Again, another observation suggested by the conduct of Orpah, is this:—The choice, as against Christ, is usually made in view of the difficulties of His service. This young woman was minded to go with her mother-in-law, so long as her view of the obstacles in the way was obscure and ill-defined. But, when she was brought face to face with the trouble and toils of the way, then she faltered and turned back. Before, she had probably had only very vague and shadowy conceptions of her husband's native place. It was a strange land to her,—a land, of which she had heard much,—a land in beauty the glory of all lands, and the scene of mighty wonders from the hand of Israel's God. So, therefore, when Naomi proposed to return to Bethlehem, she gladly acceded to the proposition; and doubtless she rejoiced at the prospect of beholding the scenes of her

loved one's early life. But when the plain unvarnished truth was laid before her, and she saw trouble ahead, her ardor cooled. Her anxiety to go gave place to a strong desire to stay. So she went back.

This, too, is a sad, but only too vivid, picture of the course of many among us, respecting the Gospel of Christ. You are greatly attached to the people of God. You love the ministry of Christ. You have a certain delight in God's day, and God's house, and God's ordinances. There is to your mind a kind of glory and beauty in religion. All these considerations lead you to go some length in the way heavenward. But, just as soon as the true character of the way and the service is discovered, your feelings undergo a radical change. You do as the thousands did, who had been fed on the hill-slopes of Bethsaida. Their enthusiasm died speedily away under the plain and searching preaching of the Saviour: and "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." In like manner, reluctantly but really you go back. You would like to drink of the waters of life; but difficulties are in the way: and so you turn away, and launch your bark upon the deep and wide and shoreless waters of a sinful world.

There is no doubt about this. You are best pleased with the man of God who garnishes the thorny way of life with roses. You like best those discourses of truth which do not bring out the roughnesses of doctrine or of life. So long as you can go on, ignorant of the hindrances of the way—even though you may have many vaguely defined forebodings—you will still go on, hop-

ing after all to get to Canaan. But, when some kind and faithful friend unveils the real character of the way before you, you go sadly but resolutely back "unto your people and unto your gods." Like Orpah, you would go; but you will stay.

4. Yet again, another reflection, suggested by the mistake of Orpah, has respect to the motive of such a choice. At first thought, we might probably get the impression that this scene on the borders of Moab was nothing more than a struggle between diverse earthly affections, —that Orpah's mind was vacillating between the land of Moab and the land of Israel,—that she was divided between her affection for her mother-in-law and sister, on the one hand, and her other relatives at home, on the other,—and that her choice fixed simply and only her earthly and temporal destiny. The future of her earthly life was certainly greatly affected by her election. But this is not the whole truth. Several parts of the narrative show that deeper and farther-reaching principles are involved in her choice. After it is made, in order to test Ruth also, Naomi says,—"Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law." This language plainly shows that, in this decision, Orpah settled, for the time being at least, and probably for eternity, her *spiritual* interests. And Naomi's words disclose the motives underlying and actuating the choice. It was the love of "her people and her gods" that took her back.

Orpah had been brought in contact with the true religion. She had seen a beautiful, though doubtless not

perfect, exemplification of the life and power of that religion in the family, into which she had married. She was probably not blind to its excellences, and the advantages attending a personal possession of it. And, if she could have worshiped and served her own gods, and remained with her own people, and at the same time could have been a worshiper of the true God, she would doubtless never have separated from her mother and sister. She was like the people, who were afterward placed by the Assyrian king in the cities of exiled Israel, "who feared Jehovah, and served their own gods." Orpah would have been glad to serve both Naomi's God and her own gods. But when it came to a choice of the one or the other, she went back "unto *her* people, and unto *her* gods."

We watch the struggle in Orpah's mind with the most intense interest. And we note the result, with a feeling of inexpressible sadness. We feel that she has made the greatest mistake of her life,—a mistake infinitely fatal in its consequences. But how much is our sorrow increased by the fact, everywhere crowding itself upon us, that essentially the same fatal mistake is being made by many of our own kindred!

And the motive is the same in both cases. "It was love to her sinful countrymen and kindred, and devotion to idols, that led to Orpah's choice. These were the two strong bonds by which Satan held her soul in captivity —the powers which counteracted and overcame the dictates of conscience, and sundered her connection with those to whom she was nearly related and tenderly attached. And the same influences have had the same

effect on multitudes besides. Domestic and social connections with those who fear not God, are among the most operative and powerful causes of continued impenitence. Common topics of conversation,—common sources of pleasure,—and a common alienation from God are their bond of union,—a magnetic attraction which draws unbelieving and earthly hearts together. The love of such associations and friendships,—the unwillingness to displease,—the want of courage to be singular,—and the fear of ridicule and contempt, are powerful impediments to conversion. They are continually suppressing conviction, and quenching the Spirit in thousands of hearts."*

Is it not so, my friends? Can anything be more evident than the fact, that one great reason why you are not a Christian to-day, is found in the prevailing power of these diverse interests? You are drifting away from Christ, because you will go back to those who, from a community of tastes and pursuits and pleasures, are peculiarly *your own people*. Oh for moral courage and heroism to decide for Christ!

> "Dare to do right! Dare to be true!
> Keep the great judgment-seat always in view."

Orpah also went back to her own gods. Her powerful attachment to the idolatrous rites of her people influenced her choice. Now, when we remember the character of the gods of Moab, and learn the abominable impurity of their worship, we shall have a flood of light

* Dr. Josiah D. Smith's "Truth in Love"; Sermon on Orpah and Ruth.

thrown upon the character of this young woman. Knowing the essential purity and moral beauty of Jehovah's worship, and not failing to mark in contrast the essential impurity of the national idolatry, Orpah yet chose to go back to her own gods. She was an idolater in heart; and therefore she joined herself unto idols.

Here also the story is full of weightiest instruction. Idolatry does not consist in heathen temples, and venerated shrines, and bowing down to images of wood and stone alone. The worst forms of idolatry are those of the heart. There is a spiritual idolatry, essentially the same in character, and inevitably leading to the same disastrous results. "The guiltiest and most God-dishonoring idolaters on the face of the earth are those *among ourselves*, who are 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,' who worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. Spiritual idolatry is the common and fundamental wickedness of the impenitent, in Christian lands; and it is the mightiest impediment to their conversion. It lies at the foundation of that already mentioned,—the sinner's unwillingness to give up Christless and worldly companions. This is the precise thing that hinders your salvation. Your heart is ungodly and *idolatrous*. You love the pleasures of sin more than the God who created you and the Saviour who died for you."*

Or, it may be, your idolatry takes another form. You are devoted to business. Your whole heart is absorbed in money-making and money-saving. When we reflect

* "Truth in Love," *ut supra*.

upon the power of this sin, and see how it does certainly keep multitudes out of heaven, we need not wonder at the solemn warning of the Word of God,—"Take heed, and beware of covetousness, WHICH IS IDOLATRY." The god of gold has many worshipers.

These are the two motives influencing many to neglect Christ, and causing them to fail at last of the great salvation. An unwillingness to forsake, if necessary, our own kindred and our father's house, and a refusal to give up our devotion to the idols we have worshiped; —these are evermore pulling us down and away from Christ. Until we cast them off, we can not entertain a reasonable hope of salvation. We shall only repeat Orpah's choice, and go to an unblessed eternity, all the more an unhappy one, that we have so often come to the very borders of the highway to the land of Canaan. And, if we make our choice, under the influence of the motives which governed the young woman of Moab, the probability is that we shall settle forever our spiritual destiny. When the love of kindred, and the idolatry of the heart's noblest affections, combine to draw us away from God, the hope of salvation henceforth hangs upon an exceedingly slender thread. The soul of such an one is in imminent danger of forever falling short of eternal life.

We must now consider,

II.—The Choice of Ruth.

In tracing the course of this sister, we have a much more pleasing task. To watch the way of the wanderer, and to see her drifting farther and farther away from

the God of Israel and the hope of salvation, is not a sight to be coveted. But it may nevertheless be our duty; and the duty may prove a blessing to our own souls. With very different feelings we take up the thread of this simple story, when duty and pleasure combine to urge upon us its careful study. The foolish choice and sorrowful destiny of the one sister ought to serve us in the way of solemn warning. But the wise election and happy end of the other stand as a mighty encouragement and sweet persuasive for our spirits to enter upon the path she trod.

1. Let us, then, look at Ruth as an example of fidelity to her convictions of the right. Powerful influences were brought to bear upon her, to lead her also to go back, abandoning her purpose to journey to the land of Canaan. There is nothing in the record to show that, in her case, there was not as great an attraction among her own people as in the case of Orpah. She was probably leaving as much behind as her sister. She could not be insensible to the pains of parting from all her friends, any more than Orpah. And now Orpah herself has yielded to the persuasion of these forces of home and nativity, and is going back. Naomi, too, is strongly urging her to do the same. From every quarter weighty considerations converge to induce her to give up the journey and to remain with her own people. But Ruth remains immovable. She has counted the cost. She has made up her mind. In the strength of God she has reached her conclusion; and now she will abide by it.

We can not but admire her fidelity. To continue faithful to one's convictions of duty, in the midst of

diverse and all adverse influences, evinces no common spirit. If Orpah had gone with Ruth, she would still have shown a faithful and resolute mind. They two, we might well believe, were but a feeble company to resist the pressure brought to bear upon them from every direction. How much more is Ruth's fidelity tried, when Orpah also joins the influences that combine to say, Come back! With that sister she had had many experiences in life in common; and their fellowship had been unusually intimate and endearing. To voluntarily choose to be separated from that sister must have been a peculiar trial to Ruth.

We all know how much easier it is to float with the current than to stem the tide,—how much easier it is to serve Christ with a multitude, than to go alone upon the way to the Zion of God. We know, too, the peculiar and unsuspected power of the forces that influence us. There are times when such is the peculiar condition of vast masses of snow, earth, and rock, on the mountain-side, that the loosening of a pebble will start the entire mass down the slope in one thundering and destructive avalanche. There are panicky conditions of mind among the multitude, in which a single, and in itself uninfluential, word will send the throng surging along with the fury of a whirlwind. Just so, there are conditions of these mental and spiritual forces of our natures, — wrought upon as they have been by influences from every quarter, — when a power seemingly weak, and from an apparently insignificant source, will cause them to sweep along in a current well-nigh irresistible. Such a power may be exerted upon a soul

under conviction of sin and inquiring the way to Christ by the persuasion, or even by the conduct, of an impenitent friend. To resist the pressure of these determining forces, and to stand firm in the critical moment of their mightiest assault, demands a fidelity as rare as it is blessed. This Ruth exhibited, when the friend of her heart and the companion of years decided to go back and remain with her own people. How mightily must she have been moved to return also to the friends and kindred of her earlier years! With what firmness of clear views of duty, and resoluteness of decision, must she have resisted the assault upon her believing and faithful spirit! With such fidelity must we also adhere to our convictions of duty and right.

2. Again, let us look at Ruth as an example of decision, under peculiarly difficult circumstances. From our point of view, we can measure the blessings attending her choice; and to us, therefore, it may seem an easy thing to do just as she did. Indeed, we readily admit the folly of the opposite course, as exemplified by Orpah. We are on the other side of the events that seemed so trying to Ruth. We can see the golden thread of God's good providence running all through the web of her life: and to us it seems most natural that she should have chosen as she did.

But suppose we place ourselves in Ruth's position; and as far as possible look at the matter with her eyes. Behind her is the home of her childhood. There are the friends and kindred, to whom she is bound by many ties. There cluster all the mingled lights and shadows of her happy years of married life. There lie the bones

and tender memories of her buried dead. How can she ever tear herself away from all these relations and associations, so interwoven with the very texture of her being!

Then, before her, lies the lonely and difficult journey to the land of Israel. And that land is an unknown country. If she goes, she must go as Abram, who, we are told, left Chaldea, "not knowing whither he went." There is little hope of temporal comfort in the change of residence. "The Lord had visited his people in giving them bread," it is true. But Naomi was very poor. "The hand of the Lord had gone out against her." Ruth's position, therefore, in the land of Canaan, would be that of "a stranger in a strange land"; and a stranger, too, in a condition of abject and hopeless poverty.

These are some of the elements of difficulty in Ruth's decision. The marvel is not that she did not go back with Orpah, but that she did not immediately yield to the powers which were persuading her, and flee from the obstacles before her. But in spite of all the hindrances in her way, Ruth came to a decision. And her decision was both right and wise. With a lowly yet lofty faith, she triumphed over all the difficulties of her position, and with a single eye to the one great duty and the one great hope, made her election,—choosing the Jehovah of Israel, who had already chosen her.

It may be that some one will read these lines, whose position is substantially the same in the things of the spirit. You have been awakened by the voice of the Holy Spirit, addressed to you in His Word or Providence.

You have been led to break partially with the world and sin; and in the exercises of repentance and inquiry to go some distance in the way to Canaan. And now you have come to the point, where, with a clearer view of your past life and of the duties yet before you, you must make your choice,—whether you will go on, or go back. And the same kind of diverse influences are moving upon your heart to lead you here or there. On the one hand, are all the things of this life,—your unconverted friends and companions,—your earthly aims and ambitions,—your daily business and associations;—all these are drawing you away from Christ, and persuading you to let go the little hold you have on spiritual things, and go back with a whole heart to the world. On the other hand, are the self-denials, conflicts, reproaches, afflictions, temptations, and persecutions;—all, in a word, that makes up the cross of a Christian life; while only in the dim distance can you discern the glory that is to follow. Which now will you choose? God forbid that you should repeat Orpah's choice,—to live without grace and to die without hope. Rather may His gracious Spirit incline you to make the choice that was made by the beloved Ruth.

But this you must emphasize to your own consciousness:—To be saved, you must look the difficulties full in the face: you must count the cost: and in the strength of God you must resolve that, let others do as they may, as for you, you will serve the Lord. If neighbor or kindred will not go with you, then you must go alone, and, in the meaning of our Lord, "hate" and "forsake" them for the kingdom of God's sake. "With-

out such a resolution, formed and acted on, you will vacillate all the days of your life; or else, after resisting the convictions of your conscience for a while, become so hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin, as to feel no concern about salvation." You must be decided, as was Ruth. You must determine to be a Christian now. You must be resolute in adhering to your conviction and purpose. "Strive to enter in at the straight gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

3. Finally, let us look at Ruth as an example of one choosing God's service from right motives. In this we find a sufficient explanation of both her fidelity and her decision. The narrative shows that her choice was made, not simply out of regard to Naomi; though she was sincerely and tenderly attached to her mother-in-law. She had also respect to "the recompense of the reward." Her heart was yearning for the land of promise, and for the worship of the true God. Her spirit was at home only among the true Israel, and she longed for communion with the chosen ones of Jehovah. With the eye of faith, she looked beyond the delusive aspects of the dissolving present, and grasped the eternal blessings of the Israel of God. In no earthly or temporal advantage which she was likely to gain, can we find a sufficient motive for her choice. The blessings she craved were of a spiritual kind. Therefore she cries, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." She sought first "the kingdom of

God, and his righteousness; and all these things were added unto her."

She found the communion she craved. We see, in the story, illustrating most beautifully the charming simplicity of those times, and no less the holy, wise, and tender providence of God, how the Lord gave her a home among His own children. The sorrows of her widowhood were taken away. She became the happy and worthy wife of the honored and honorable Boaz. And her place in the history of God's dealings with His Church is an eminent one henceforth and forever. She became the great-grandmother of David; and so, though not of Israel according to the flesh, the ancestress of our blessed Lord. Her name finds an honored place in the genealogy of the Saviour of mankind; and so is held in everlasting remembrance. But Orpah's disappears from the history as the name of one who lived under the power of the life that now is. Ruth made her choice with reference to the future; and all that future rises up evermore to crown her name and character with heavenly benedictions. Orpah chose her destiny, with an eye only to present things; and in the wreck of her land and times her name and hopes have perished forever.

Such were the contrasted choices of Orpah and Ruth. Like one or the other must be ours. If you choose as Orpah did, you may escape much present trial; and all the immediate future may be bright and blessed. But the end shall nevertheless be one of bitterness and sorrow inexpressible. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death."

If you choose as Ruth did, you enter at once upon "a straight and thorny way." A life of toil and sacrifice for the present is before you; but the end is peace. That way leads you at last over the land of Beulah, and up to the gates of "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." God help us to choose aright.

VII.

SAMUEL AND SAUL.

IN the twilight times of the Hebrew Commonwealth the Tabernacle stood at Shiloh. It found there a resting-place two hundred years before the siege of Troy. Homer and his immortal song were yet unborn: and the first page of profane history, as we know it, was yet to be written. The old High-Priest of Israel, at the time to which we have now come, sat by the Sanctuary. He was almost a hundred years old. He saw, what seemed to him (by no means an unusual sight), a drunken woman bowing before the house of God, and heard her muttering a maudlin, incoherent, and indistinguishable prayer. Eli was mistaken. He is not the only one who has misjudged the agonizing suppliant, and counted those filled with new wine, who in fact were filled with the Spirit. It was a believing daughter of Israel that prayed before the Tabernacle. No audible voice broke the silence; but the prayer went up before the throne, and prevailed with Israel's God. That prayer will be heard from yet, though the suppliant rise, and go her way, and disappear.

A few years later, and that woman, now a mother in fact as before she had been in desire, again appears be-

fore the aged Priest, bringing the son of her prayers and tears, "to lend him to the Lord as long as he shall live." We are all familiar with the incomparable story. It is our introduction to Samuel. We may well observe him, as doubtless old Eli did. There is a future before the lad, than which none is greater in the Old Testament story, except that of Moses.

Not all good children die while young. Sought for, and obtained in answer to prayer, and nurtured in the fear of the Lord, even in our time there are some who in early life choose the God of their fathers to be their God, and accomplish illustrious careers, the opening steps of which are taken from their mothers' knees, and away from the threshold of a godly home. It is to our shame, and not through any breach of the household covenant, that such instances are not multiplied as the dew of the morning. But it is folly to expect a generation of Samuels, when family religion decays; and when from irreligious firesides our young people go forth with the impression that, as a matter of course, they shall lead an ungodly life, while they wait for the mysterious regeneration of the Holy Spirit. This, indeed, they must have; and, were there more of Hannah's faith and fidelity, they might have it, long before the evil days of sin and wandering come.

From such a home, Samuel came to minister before the Lord. But with his early life we are not specially concerned at present. It is sufficient to say that, as he grew up, all Israel came to know, "from Dan to Beersheba, that he was established to be a prophet of the Lord." By slow processes, running over many years, he

came at last to exert a commanding influence all through the land. The last of the Judges, by the decisive defeat of Israel's most powerful enemies, and by the incorruptible administration of justice, he gave a stability and permanence to the internal affairs of the Commonwealth, such as the people had never before known. It is possible that the very success of Samuel's administration paved the way to the introduction of the Monarchy. The people learned the advantages of a strong government, even though centralized. They perceived, too, the advancing years of Samuel; and, dreading the confusion and failure of authority from the already manifest incapacity of his sons, they began to think of a king.

We turn, then, to the other great personage in this critical period of the history of the Hebrew people;—and to our first reflection upon these related lives of King and Prophet.

I.—The Anointing of Saul as King of Israel.

The first meeting of the two prominent actors in the drama is a significant illustration of the marvels of Divine Providence; and especially of that feature of it, in which incidents the most trifling are made the pivot on which turn tremendous destinies. The agile recovery of a stumbling horse, it is said, gave the battle of Zama to Rome rather than to Carthage, and so shaped the direction of all modern history. The twittering of a bird saved the life of Mahomet, and so founded the empire of the Moslem and the Saracen. So, it is told,* a broken

* *The Sunday Magazine*, 1865, page 22.

helmet-clasp led to the overthrow of the first Bonaparte. And so it was the straying of some untethered asses, that led the unsuspecting Saul athwart his royal destiny. With such illustrations of the minutiæ of Providence, are we not warranted in saying they talk foolishly who speak so loftily of a general Providence, while they deny His special intervention in the affairs of men? All God's providences are special. The minutiæ form the mass. The falling sparrow and the numbered hair attest the universal supremacy of the Divine care.

Thus, led by a hand he saw not, Saul came to Samuel. Who has not dwelt, with unwearying interest, upon the simple picture of home life in those early days? We need only point to its various suggestive details. The loss of the asses, we may well believe, created no small stir in the quiet life of the farm. Many, doubtless, were the efforts put forth by the family to discover them in the immediate neighborhood, before the son and servant were commissioned for a longer journey. And then that journey, how it is described as if it were no little matter to the retired household! The search was long, but unavailing. About to return, to relieve the anxieties of the home circle, how natural the servant's suggestion, that, inasmuch as they were near his city, they should go and consult the Seer! And what a picture of their homely poverty, that questioning and search for a suitable present for the Man of God! How happy and relieved they were by the discovery that there yet remained a quarter of a silver shekel! Then follow in quick succession the other incidents of the charming story,—their going up the hill, to meet the maidens of

the city going down to the well to draw water,—their inquiry after the Seer,—the maidens' prompt, full, and re-assuring answer,—their street encounter with the object of their search, who, Divinely directed, was looking and waiting for them. How soon does he allay their anxieties about the asses! Then come the sacrifice and feast, where Saul has the seat of honor, and the double portion. Who can tell how he was affected by the prophet's vague revealings of the Benjamite's royal future? That housetop interview in the gloaming of the evening, what was its character and influence upon the goodly young man? Who can believe that Saul slept much that balmy quiet night in the house of the prophet? All this is followed by the secret anointing of the early dawn. And this by the journey home, so short, but so full of foretold but singular occurrences! What a picture of sweet simplicity the annalist has painted of life in those primitive times! Surely a ruler worthy of such a people must come up from such unostentatious but none the less ennobling circumstances!

Let us now endeavor to form some idea of his character, who is to begin the long line of Israel's kings. He possessed some noble traits of character, as well as a commanding physical presence. Seven feet high, his was a goodly person. Probably forty years old at this time, with a son, Jonathan, already a young stripling, he was himself strongly characterized by his filial affection. Though absent but a few days, his heart responds to a father's anxiety, and he proposes to return, lest his father cease caring for the asses through solicitude for his son. The whole region, covering these scenes of his earlier

years, is scarcely more than forty miles square. This fact shows that Saul had lived an exceedingly retired life. It measurably explains another prominent trait of his character at this time,—his unaffected modesty. With charming ingenuousness he disclaims the prophet's hints of his coming honors. And when Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, to receive their king, the Divinely selected sovereign must be drawn from his hiding-place among the baggage of the assembled thousands.

When we add to this filial reverence, and shrinking unobtrusiveness, that chivalrous generosity which would not suffer any of his opposers to be put to death, and that fearless courage, and executive promptness, which he began immediately to display, it will not seem to be saying too much to say that Saul comes before us, to win us by many prepossessing characteristics. He was a fitting choice for Israel's king. And yet Saul's public career is a terribly saddening tragedy,—its darkening elements—error, remorse, jealousy, anger, melancholy, madness, and suicide. The cause of this sorrowful transformation will appear in the course of thought now before us. For the present, we have to do with the second great scene, in which King and Prophet meet together before the people.

II.—The Transfer of Royal Power.

True to his modest nature, Saul did not immediately assume the royal state. He went home and kept the herd of cattle as before. Events were rapidly shaping themselves to call out his kingly powers. The siege of Jabesh-Gilead, and the barbarous proposal of the Am-

monite to accept the service of the conquered city, only after he had put out the right eyes of all the people, aroused all Israel, and bound them to their new sovereign in his prompt, masterly, and successful march to the relief of the beleaguered fortress. The aged Prophet, wise and kind to the victorious monarch, saw that now the time had come for his own formal retirement from official position, and for Saul's complete investiture with regal honors.

So he called an assembly of the people at Gilgal, in the plain of the Jordan,—the first camping-ground of Israel in the land of promise. He here publicly announced his demission of the office of judge over the people, that he might take up the more delicate and responsible duties of a prophet—to act as the representative of Jehovah. His retirement is accompanied by a lofty challenge to point to anything unjust in his administration of affairs. "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you." And the stainless purity of his life, growing out of the simplicity, the fulness, and the thoroughness of his dedication to God (made first by his mother, and early ratified by himself), is now publicly and emphatically endorsed and sealed by the acclamations of the entire people. It was a proud day for Samuel. Fittingly in such a day closes the illustrious line of Judges, who, for three hundred years, had ruled the Theocratic Commonwealth.

But Samuel, closing the line of Judges, opens also the long line of the Prophets. The prophetical office was established at the very time the throne was built up. It was Divinely appointed to run parallel with the monarchy, the instructor of princes, and a brake on the wheel of despotic power. Indeed, it was never intended that the sovereign in Israel should be an autocratic, but a theocratic, king. The High-Priest, in ordinary times, and the Prophet, in extraordinary seasons, being in secular matters subject to the king, were, each in his own sphere, possessed of co-ordinate powers.

It was Saul's early and persistent disregard of this fundamental principle of the Hebrew Monarchy, that led to the rupture which soon occurred between himself and Samuel. The first prophet was not a priest; and it is a great mistake to suppose that this is a quarrel between the king and the priest, and the type of all conflicts between the royal and sacerdotal powers. Samuel was still the representative of God; and with him the royal sovereign must take counsel in guiding the affairs of the kingdom. In this Saul failed; and the failure led to his downfall.

The two successive steps in the fall of the king of Israel, from the high place to which he had been so recently chosen, we are now to trace.

III.—The First Disobedience.

This first wrong step was taken at Michmash—or, speaking more accurately, at Gilgal, in beginning the campaign against Michmash. This was a strong and rocky fortress in the heart of the tribe of Benjamin, and nearly mid-

way between Bethel and the rock Jebus, or Jerusalem. It was still occupied by the Philistines. To dispossess them formed the second military project of King Saul. The people did not respond so readily to the royal summons as before, when the new king had coupled the prophet's well-known and honored name with his own in the call to arms. Such as did respond, assembled with the warrior-prince at Gilgal, to wait by appointment seven days for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice, and ask Divine direction in the war. The time passed slowly to the impatient king. The prophet did not come within the time appointed: and Saul, witnessing the daily diminution of his little army, could wait no more; and, usurping the prerogative of the prophet, offered himself the sacrifice. His faithful monitor immediately appears. Rebuking him for his disobedience and impiety, and foretelling his displacement from the throne, Samuel sternly leaves the guilty king, and returns to Gibeah in Benjamin.

Our first impression of this sentence is that it was terribly severe. So far as we know, it was Saul's first public and official mistake and error. And we are tempted to say, Samuel ought to have given Saul another chance, before announcing the future transfer of the crown to another family. But the same demand might have been made by Adam and Eve in the garden. There, as here, it was the first offence. There, as here, the wrong-doing, speaking after the manner of men, was but a trifle. But there, as here, it was an unmistakable command. There, as here, it was a clear violation of a known duty. And, in both cases, the sin was germinal. It disclosed

a bad heart, and was the origin of all other transgressions.

A late writer puts the case in this strong, but perfectly just manner: "Subjecting Saul's sin to strict analysis, it is not difficult to perceive that in the deed itself, and in the excuse he offered for it, there lay the seeds of all those vices of character that afterwards so fully and so fatally developed themselves in his disastrous career. An impulsiveness that would not wait to consider—an impatience that could not brook restraint—a self-will that would not bow its neck to any yoke—a self-deception if not untruthfulness that put lying excuses into his lips, and taught him to use the tyrant's plea—a superstition which placed that value on the mere form of a religious act that belongs only to the spirit in which it is performed—and a godless independence and insubordination that made light of the direction and aid of heaven, and threw off the authority of God—all these lay folded up in embryo here. They are only expanded in the subsequent history." *

This impatience, giving rise to disobedience, comes out in the after-incidents of this same campaign. Through his impatience he had disregarded the prophet; and soon after, from the same cause, he treated the high-priest in the same way. Samuel had left him in anger; and now the king turns to the minister at the altar, that he may inquire of the Lord for him. In the meantime, Jonathan and his armor-bearer have assailed the garrison of

* Hanna's "Saul, First King of Israel," in *The Sunday Magazine*, 1864, page 204.

the rocky fortress; and the unexpected assault has created a panic throughout the entire host of the enemy. This is soon perceived by Saul's eager and eagle eyes: and, leaving the high-priest with uplifted hands in the very act of seeking to know the will of God, he takes the fortunes of war in his own hands, and hurries off to battle!

The same rash and irreligious spirit comes out again in his foolish oath, which, but for the generous intervention of the people themselves, had been the cause of the death of Jonathan. A thousand years later, no generous and powerful friends appeared in Herod's court to intercede for John the Baptist: and so he died, on the demand of a meretricious dancing-girl. But Herod's oath was not more rash and wicked than King Saul's. Both alike were disobedient and irreligious men, and impatient of rebuke from their faithful friends.

But Saul is not yet utterly forsaken. The kingdom must pass out of his family; but he shall have one more opportunity to recover for himself the Divine favor. And so we come to the other step in his downfall, viz.—

IV.—The Second Disobedience.

He is now commissioned as the instrument of Divine vengeance against the Amalekites. Here again he receives from the prophet an explicit command. He was to "Smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." With the apparent severity of the commission he had nothing to do. Nor is it in the line of our present re-

flections to tarry for any explanation of that severity. Saul's duty was to fulfil his marching orders; and we are to mark his failure, for fail he did. He spared the king, of Israel's enemies, and the best of the sheep and cattle. It was not, however, from any motives of humanity or piety. It was to grace the triumphal return with the spoils of the war, that he violated the command of the Lord.

His disobedience brings again the prophet and the king together, for the last time in the life of Samuel. The narrative shows that Saul had reached the crisis of his reign; and it is exceedingly suggestive. The meeting is a sorrowful one. The Lord had told Samuel of the king's disobedience. All night long the prophet had cried unto the Lord in behalf of the guilty sovereign: but Jehovah would not reverse the decree. Saul is irrevocably rejected. It only remains for the prophet to announce the fact. Samuel comes, therefore, freighted with heavy tidings. But the king, unconscious of the impending arraignment and condemnation, comes to that last interview with his early and faithful friend with loud professions of obedience,—"Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord." It is evident that the habit of disobedience, as is always the case, had blunted the king's moral perceptions. He did not feel that he had deviated from the commands of Jehovah and His prophet. But Samuel's reply to his boastful greeting quickens both his memory and conscience,—"What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

The king's answer shows now his consciousness of

guilt. He remembered that he had been commanded to destroy everything belonging to the accursed race of Amalekites, and that the cattle and sheep had been expressly specified. He knew that he had not obeyed that command. What shall he say in explanation of this course, which in the subject of a king was rebellion, and in a servant of God was a heinous sin, and in a soldier was a crime justly punishable with death? He seeks first to excuse himself. It was the people who had spared the cattle. It was not the king, but the army. It was the same old story with which the garden of Eden has made us familiar. It was not Adam, but Eve. It was not Eve, but the Serpent. This was one of the basest features of Saul's sin,—to seek to escape from guilt by putting the blame upon the people, whom he had led, and for whose obedience he was responsible. He seems immediately to have come to the consciousness of this. And so his next step is to excuse the people. It is true they had not strictly obeyed the letter of the command: but their deviation from it arose from a pious motive. They had spared the cattle for sacrifice. With great ingenuity Saul put forward this plea again and again. They were very far from the spirit of disobedience. On the contrary, they were so much of the prophet's own mind that the great object they had in bringing home the cattle of their enemies was to offer a fitting sacrifice to the God whom Samuel worshiped and served. They had broken the letter of their orders, but it was to honor the God of their beloved Samuel! Surely there could be no great harm in such a course of conduct, even though it was not just the course laid down in the commandment!

The king's ingenious plea is altogether and ominously silent about the fact that he had spared also the king of the Amalekites, the doomed Agag. This shows plainly enough the hollowness of Saul's plausible excuse. It is manifest that the haughty Saul had spared the conquered king and the most valuable of his possessions, only to minister to his own pride in the glory of a triumphal return. For this he is ready to risk the consequences of God's displeasure and the prophet's rebuke. And all this extenuating plea was an afterthought, intended to mollify the prophet's anger.

The aged Samuel assumes both the insufficiency and insincerity of Saul's plea. He immediately proceeds, in faithful terms, and yet in a way best suited to awaken the king's ennobling memories, and so to soften his hardening heart, to denounce the conduct of the guilty man, and to announce his personal and irrevocable rejection from the Divine favor. The rebuke is as righteous as it is severe. Its words are full of weightiest instruction for us. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." "There is something singularly impressive in this testimony to the comparative worthlessness of all sacrifices and burnt-offerings, issuing from the very heart of the Levitical institute, spoken at the very time when all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord, touching the manifold services of the sanctuary, were in full force." *

There is an important lesson for us in this testimony

* Dr. Hanna, *ut supra*.

of the aged Samuel. The spirit of religion is more than the form of it. In his first disobedience Saul had exalted the act of sacrifice above all consideration of the spirit in which it was to be offered. In this second act of transgression he would condone his disobedience by offering on the altar some of the spoils of the war. He will maintain here as there the form of worship, though he turn not from his sins, and regard not the spirit of his approach to God. But the spirit of religion is everything. And that spirit, the prophet tells him, is obedience to the will of God. This must underrun and inform everything else. We may be surprised to find this lesson taught in the midst of the ceremonial dispensation: but it is eminently a fitting lesson for even the noontide of our Gospel day.

Samuel evidently believed that Saul's plea was insincere. His excuse was only an afterthought. If this be thought an uncharitable judgment, and we admit the sincerity of his plea, we find even then no extenuation of the king's guilt. We see only how pious he was in his sin. He will soothe his conscience, and cover to himself the enormity of his disobedience, by a great sacrifice unto the Lord. How like his is the human heart in all ages! Such conduct is sometimes the token of a terrible self-deception. One of the saddest facts in our experience is the devotion of professed Christians to the forms of worship while their lives are far from what they ought to be. A family is rent with dissensions and bitterness: but the forms of home piety are sedulously observed in the morning and evening worship. A church may be divided into factions, with daily quar-

rels and unseemly bickerings and strifes: but for a time, at least, all the ordinances of God's house will be maintained with a scrupulous exactness, and even unusual fervor and fulness. The explanation of this dreadful state of things is not difficult. In outward observances men seek an anodyne for consciences that will persist in telling of their misery.

But sometimes this kind of conduct is the crowning evidence of the fact that the soul is lost to all that is holy and right. It knows its sin; and it cloaks it not to its own eye, for that can never be, but to the eye of its fellow, that it may yet gain some advantage for itself. Conscious, deliberate hypocrisy is usually the last and worst form of sin to which the hardened soul surrenders itself.

This was the sin of King Saul. And hence his solemn judgment and rejection by the mouth of the sorrowing prophet. Samuel's rebuke seemed to touch the king; but it was only a seeming. He cried, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy word." But his repentance was like that of Cain, and Esau, and Judas. He grieved, not over the sin, but over its consequences. He feared the effect upon the people of an open rupture with Samuel. And so he besought him nevertheless to turn and worship with him in the sacrifice. The prophet turned, indeed, but it was to execute the wrath of God upon Agag. Then, gathering up his rent mantle, emblem of the kingdom torn from Saul, he left the guilty sovereign with his ill-gotten booty. "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death; nevertheless Samuel mourned

for Saul." The king was undone; and the prophet knew it. They met but once more on earth. That sorrowful scene we must now portray. And so we come to

V.—The Final Interview.

The long years of melancholy, so profound, and with the years increasing evermore, until no minstrel's harp had power to charm the troubled spirit,—the bitter and relentless persecution of the ruddy shepherd of Bethlehem,—and the various wars of King Saul with the enemies of his kingdom;—all these we must pass by. These years of Saul's reign are full of the interest of a darkening tragedy; but we have no special interest in them just now; because Samuel, the other factor in our theme, drops out of the history, and eventually dies before the curtain falls upon the drama of Saul's life. And yet Samuel and Saul meet once more.

Thirty years have passed away since the irrevocable doom was pronounced at Gilgal. The hosts of the Philistines, increasing in power and activity as the sovereignty of King Saul wanes, have gathered on the eastern edge of the great plain of Esdraelon, and on the foot-hills of Tabor and Gilboa. "More decisive battles have been fought on this plain than on any other spot on earth. Chaldeans, Assyrians, Midianites, Israelites, Philistines, Egyptians, Crusaders, Saracens, Turks, Arabs, and French have met here in deadly strife, to trample in dust and blood the banners wet with the dews of Tabor and Hermon." Saul and Israel were on the heights of Gilboa.

Samuel was dead; and the Lord had forsaken the un-

happy king. To his cries for guidance and help, there came no response from the God of Israel, either by prophet or dream; and the miserable king was sore distressed. The toils of the destroyer were closing in around him more and more tightly. He felt that he must have counsel; and so, deserted of God and His servants, he sought for light in the wizard's baleful vaticinations. She lived at Endor. Her wretched home, perhaps some cave in the rock, was on the very edge of the hostile forces. Saul in impenetrable disguise, accompanied only by his servants, journey to her place under cover of the night, passing probably up the Jordan valley, and thence up the steep and rugged south-eastern slope of Mt. Tabor. It was a strange, unseemly journey for a king. But Saul was in a desperate strait.

It was a strange and mysterious interview, that meeting of the sorceress and the king of Israel. And stranger still was the apparition of the aged prophet, the earliest and most faithful friend of the royal Saul. It would but cumber these pages, and serve no useful purpose, to detail the various opinions of learned men concerning this singular episode in the life of Saul. It will be enough for us simply to express our judgment that this was a real appearance of Samuel, for wise purposes Divinely permitted. It was the last meeting on earth of king and prophet. How different from their first meeting forty years before! Then Saul was in the prime of his opening manhood. A magnificent future lay before the goodly young man; and he possessed the qualities to make that future one of great joy to himself, and blessing to the people over whom he was about to be called

to reign. Now an old and broken man, he stands on the other side of those then untried years, to realize the disappointment of wasted opportunities and squandered powers.

Most pitifully does the perplexed and guilty king pour into the ears of his early friend the tale of his sorrows. With bowed form and buried face he answers the prophet's question, "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" by the sad lament,—"I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams; therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do." Samuel had mourned for Saul; but the days of his mourning were now ended. There is an awful solemnity and earnestness in the prophet's last message to the man, whom he had so often counselled and sought to lead in the right way. But there is no longer any pity,—no longer any mercy. The day of mercy is done. The hour of retribution has come. And so the prophet answers,—"Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the Lord hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David: because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also

shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines." With these dreadful words of doom, the shade of Samuel disappeared; and Saul, overwhelmed by the heavy tidings, fell prostrate upon the ground, "and there was no strength in him."

The fated morning dawned at length. Saul had risen from the depths into which his spirits had sunk, and in the morning was at the head of his forces. He knew what should be the result of that day's battle, and perhaps he fought with the energy of despair, perhaps with the shrinking of a coward. But whether fearful or fearless, his fighting was of no avail; and the end, inevitable and terrible, soon came. We need not dwell upon the sorrowful story. Over the din and tumult of that dark day in the annals of the Hebrew people, rings out forever the song of the Psalmist, celebrating in elegiac strains the noblest virtues of the royal Saul, and the sweet, self-sacrificing friendship of the well-beloved Jonathan. "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!"

One vastly important lesson we must learn from these related lives,—as truly emphasized by Samuel's illustrious career, as by Saul's darkening course and tragic end,—that is this, viz.: The path of safety, happiness, and honor is the path of unswerving obedience to the will of God.

VIII.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

THE story of Damon and Pythias is the classic model and illustration of friendship. It is an old story; and all are probably familiar with its affecting incidents. Damon is condemned to death by Dionysius. The execution is delayed that he may return home and arrange his domestic affairs. But some one must be surety for his appearance at the appointed time, and prepared to die in his stead, if he be not forthcoming. Pythias steps forward to occupy the place of his friend. Time passes. The doomful hour has come, but no Damon. Pythias cheerfully prepares to be a sacrifice upon the altar of friendship. He is just giving expression to the gladness of his heart that adverse winds have detained Damon's vessel beyond the fatal moment, when Damon himself rushes breathless upon the scene. The Tyrant of Syracuse, inured to scenes of cruelty, is so moved by the spectacle of the two friends contending for the place of suffering and death, that he remits the punishment, and begs a share in friendship so strong and constant.

Multitudes have read and been charmed by the faultless tale. And we wonder not. "Greater love hath

no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

The place which the friendship of Damon and Pythias occupies in classic literature, is, in the Scripture story, filled by its parallel and equal,—the friendship of David and Jonathan. It is difficult to decide which is the better illustration of a sentiment so ennobling and honorable wherever it appears. The inspired narrative may lack the brevity and the definite outlines of the Sicilian story; but it gains immensely in a charming minuteness of detail, which makes it far more interesting, and which gives it a place in the front rank of these incomparable episodes of the Hebrew history.

Possessing such elements of popularity and power, as well as of valuable instruction, the story deserves our thoughtful examination.

The young men—David and Jonathan—come together, for the first time, under circumstances of peculiar interest, and such as were well fitted to knit their hearts together in the bonds of a common affection.

It was during one of those forays of the Philistines into the territory of Israel, which were not uncommon along the borders of the hostile nations. The contending armies were encamped on opposite heights overlooking the valley of Elah. This valley is described by Robinson as running in a northwesterly direction, being about a mile wide, with fertile soil, and a brook running through the center, while on either side, and rising with a uniform and steep ascent, stretches a line of hills five hundred feet above the level of the valley. On these opposing hill-tops were encamped the armies of Israel and

Philistia. And down into the valley between, daily strode the champion giant, impiously defying "the armies of the living God." There, also, beyond the brook, and in full view of both armies on the heights above, the stripling,—ruddy and youthful David,—appears for mortal combat with Goliath, panoplied with Divine protection, and armed with a sling and stones from the brook.

The young warrior was observed with different emotions by many in Saul's host. All doubtless thought him a foolhardy and rash adventurer. His brothers envied while they scorned him. The king himself looked on with doubtfulness and wonder. But one heart was there that beat in unison with the youthful shepherd's heroic purpose. That was Jonathan's, the king's son. The noble prince immediately recognized a kindred spirit. The undaunted heroism of David, in meeting the champion alone, is not unlike Jonathan's romantic and well-nigh single-handed assault upon the rocky stronghold of Michmash. No wonder then the heart of the prince went out to David! No warmer welcome greeted the victorious champion of Israel, as he climbed the slope bearing the giant's head and spear, than he received from the prince-royal of the house of Saul. Under the impulse of a generous admiration, he even stripped off his robe, and put it upon David, and "armed him with his own sword and bow!" "And the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." It was the beginning of a life-long, and often-tried, but ever unwavering friendship. This relation of the Prince to the Shepherd suggests, as the fruitful theme of our present reflections,

A number of Observations concerning True Friendship.

It is a part of the fulness of Divine Revelation that the Bible not only makes known to us the way of salvation, but also by precepts and examples enlightens us as to our duties in respect to all the cardinal virtues of an upright and benevolent life. Among these virtues, Friendship has a most important place. The history of the relations of David and Jonathan illustrates, for one thing,

I.—The Conditions of Friendship.

The grounds upon which a genuine friendship must ever rest are not easily explained. Perhaps it is impossible to explain them. "It is not mere esteem, for we may esteem one for whom we have not this peculiar attachment. It is not mere congeniality of temper, for, though friendship can exist only between kindred spirits, it is such congeniality as admits of wide diversity of age, culture, engagements, and even tastes. It would seem rather that true friendship, like some other attachments of life, springs in a large degree out of inexplicable sympathies between the parties." *

It seemed to be so in the friendship of David and Jonathan. Theirs was not a friendship between equals in age, or rank, or social position. In the subsequent history, David rises so high, and becomes so truly great, that, unconsciously antedating the growth of these elements of his greatness, we come to regard him as the chief person in these scenes of his earlier years. This,

* Dr. J. M. Lowrie's "Life of David," pp. 71–72.

however, is a mistake, as will appear from closer attention to the history. So long as Jonathan lived, he was superior to David,—especially in every outward circumstance. Indeed it is not at all unlikely that he was the more mature in all the nobler qualities of mind and heart; and that he exerted an immeasurable influence in shaping and developing the naturally more gifted mind of his friend. At any rate, in the beginning of the acquaintance of these two friends, Jonathan, older in years perhaps, was certainly David's superior in rank. The latter was but an immature and rustic shepherd boy, with little outcropping of his future greatness; while Jonathan was the crown-prince. In all the kingdom, there was but one greater than he. Yet David and Jonathan were thoroughly knit together in an unbroken friendship, which grew daily stronger with the changing years.

In the light of this Scriptural example, it can not be regarded as a quixotic view of true friendship that holds that equality in wealth or in the social scale is not one of its necessary conditions. Many, indeed, will regard such a statement as a grand heresy. Very true, also, it is that much that is called friendship never surmounts these barriers of our artificial life. But this is nothing to the purpose. True friendships may be formed, as in the case of these two young Hebrews, between the Prince and the Shepherd. And while it is no doubt the fact that many parents wrong their children, in thoughtlessly allowing improper intimacies, we can hardly resist the thought that others do theirs wrong by restricting in other directions the range of their friendships.

Because you have a little more money than your neighbor, and can dress your children in better clothes than his can wear, you foolishly shut up the Divinely-ordered and mutually outgoing sympathies of yours to his, though his may be, in every other respect, the worthy peers of yours or of any. You act very foolishly in this, for, to mention no other reason, the shepherd-boys of to-day may be the kings of their generation, when the princes of the blood lie in unhonored graves!

Is there then no condition necessary to the existence of true friendship? We answer, Yes, there is one, without which it can not exist. It is the one that pre-eminently marks the intercourse of David and Jonathan. True and lasting friendship must be founded upon virtuous principle. "Every good writer upon this subject acknowledges that virtue is necessary to the firm and just esteem and affection inspired by true friendship. It is interesting to notice, in Cicero's treatise upon Friendship, in how strong terms he condemns the thought that any one for friendship's sake should be willing to do an unrighteous thing. It is no excuse for a fault that it was committed for the sake of a friend; for friendship can not exist when we depart from virtue. It is asking too much of any friend to demand that he should support or aid us in wrong. It is not in the nature of things that we can put confidence in one who would do so; for he who is willing to wrong truth and justice can hardly be faithful to anything else: and he can easily judge that one who wishes him so to do would not scruple to do the same. The attachments of wicked men are liable to be easily sundered when policy or advantage

seems to demand this. A true and reliable friendship rests upon the solid foundation of virtuous principles."* A friend, therefore, who connives at our own wrong-doing, or demands of us, as the price of his friendship, that we should depart from the line of strictest rectitude, is not a friend, but an enemy in disguise. He may be influential, able to help us greatly, and loud in his professions of attachment to us; but the simple, naked fact is, he is our enemy—a wolf in sheep's clothing. If we are wise we shall beware of him, nor be ensnared by a hypocritical show of regard, while he means us evil all the time.

This Scripture story of the Prince and Shepherd illustrates, for another thing,

II.—The Trials of Friendship.

It was easy enough for the young men to be friends, and to live in the closest intimacy, so long as no barrier rose up to hinder the flow of their mutual sympathies. While David is at court, the sweet singer and charming minstrel of peace to a troubled mind,—while he is high in favor with his sovereign, adopted into the royal family, and married to the king's daughter,—while the sun of prosperity shines upon both;—under these circumstances, it is not difficult for David and Jonathan to live in the happy intercourse of loving companionship. And under similar circumstances, in our time, as well, friendship is neither difficult nor uncommon.

But such conditions long continued are exceedingly

* "The Life of David," *ut supra*, pp. 77–78.

rare. And "the friendships are few that survive years of separation, the shock of conflicting interests, the drain made on our old affections by new claims, the trials they are put to by infirmities of temper, by plain dealing with faults, by a manly independence, by requests refused, by favors unrequited, by the rivalries of business, and by a thousand other nameless circumstances." * Yet these are the common trials and tests of friendship. If it be said, as it must be, that all true friendship will survive these numerous mutations, then it must also be said that true friendship is one of the rarest of all rare jewels; and this also is true.

But we can not suffer ourselves to doubt that it does exist at present, as it has existed in the past. This was the friendship of David and Jonathan. It stood the severest test. The day came when the friends were compelled to separate. The king's evil eye was upon David. Before he had any certain knowledge of the fact, Saul's jealous spirit had divined that David was his Divinely chosen successor. And with the growth of that conviction, he increased his efforts to put him out of the way. Yielding, therefore, to the necessities of the case, the friends met in the morning dawn for a sorrowful parting. They were to meet but once more on earth. They knew not of this, however, and indeed had not expected to meet this time. But they found they could not deny themselves one more interview. So Jonathan sent his boy back into the city, with his bow and

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* Dr. Guthrie's "Old Testament Characters," in *The Sunday Magazine*, 1859, p. 370.

arrows; and behind the sign-post (as its name signifies), the stone Ezel, the friends met to condole with each other over the sudden termination of their years of fellowship, and to bind themselves by solemn covenant for the years to come. The test of their friendship was a severe one, but it stood the test.

We can easily see that David had great reason to fear the rupture of a friendship now so intimate. He was no longer the favorite at court. In after-years he had opportunity to know how few would cling even to a king in disgrace and fleeing from his capital. Could he now suppose that Jonathan, the king's son, surrounded by all the attractions of the court, and possessing everything that heart could wish, would continue to care for him, a fugitive and vagabond, outlawed by the king, and driven into an attitude of hostility to Jonathan's own father, whom with all his faults Jonathan still faithfully and tenderly loved? We should have said to David, that all the probabilities were that Jonathan would soon forget him, and leave him to his miserable fate. But we should have misjudged the friendship of the crown-prince of Israel. David was never forgotten, in Saul's court, by the friend of his opening manhood. It was the constancy of Jonathan's friendship that touched the tenderest cord in David's heart, as he sang, in after-years, his song of grateful recollection, "Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

We wonder at the love, though not at the song, when we remember the conflicting interests of the two friends. "Out of sight, out of mind," is a common proverb, as true as trite. Few friendships can bear the shock of

simple separation, especially if that separation be protracted. Far fewer friendships will stand the additional strain of not merely diverse, but conflicting interests. Yet the friendship of David and Jonathan was not ruptured by such a trial, presented in the most seductive and powerful form. Jonathan knew, at last, as he probably suspected, from the first, as well as his father, that David was to be king. He knew also that the succession, in natural order, would bring the crown to his own head. He knew further that he had only to say the word; and the myrmidons of royal power would speedily destroy David. He needed to take no active part at all. Were he simply to remain quiet, and permit it to be done, it would be enough. His own father had urged upon him the fatal nature of his friendship for David. "As long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom." Yet Jonathan would not lift a finger, nor touch a hair of the head of his friend. Nor would he, so far as it lay in his power to prevent it, permit any one else,—not even his own father,—to do him any injury. A vastly stronger reason, than Esau as to Jacob, had Jonathan for regarding David as a supplanter: but he never felt nor manifested the slightest trace of jealousy, nor suffered a moment's interruption to his friendly regard for the son of Jesse.

One other test of friendship was encountered by the crown-prince's affection for David. Plain words were spoken before that meeting of the two friends at the stone sign-post outside the city gates. Jonathan could not, up to this time, believe that his father cherished any evil design against David. It was, therefore, a matter of

no little delicacy for David to persist in so serious a charge against the father of his friend. He said to Jonathan, "What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" But Jonathan replied, "God forbid: thou shalt not die; behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so. And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved; but truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." The plain words, so skilfully veiled, did not break the friendship.

This, however, is their general effect. It is a true friendship, indeed, that will bear the pressure of unvarnished truth. Many are the friendships which, apparently sincere and intimate, dissolve, like the tracery of the frost-king, before the warmth of outspoken truth. He who dares to tell us when we are wrong, who refuses to connive at our sin, who declines affiliation with us in the same, who rebukes us by word and example—he is a true and faithful friend. If we are wise and love our own souls, we shall be glad to leave the crowd of sycophants, and parasites, and flatterers, of which the world is full, to take counsel always of him. He does not become our enemy, who tells us the truth. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

One other aspect of the general subject is well illustrated by the story of David and Jonathan, viz.—

III.—The Triumphs of True Friendship.

Years of checkered experience pass away. If David is tried and disciplined by his wanderings, and by the persecutions of Saul, Jonathan is not left without peculiar and grievous trials, in the court of his father, now so manifestly forsaken of God. We all say Jonathan had the more difficult lot. It would seem again and again as if his friendship for David, or his love for his father must be given up. He did neither. Like Him, another well-beloved Son, who died to reconcile a Father's love and law, Jonathan surrendered the throne to his friendship for David, and his life to the love he bore to his father.

It was under the conviction that this surrender of the throne was the will of God, that Jonathan sought out his early friend in the forest of Ziph. It was their final interview. No one can read the brief record, without observing the profound feeling of both parties, chastened and softened by their multiform trials. They here renewed their solemn covenant. The submissive but sanguine spirit of Jonathan drew a charming picture of the coming happier days, when David should be king, and he the king's prime minister. It was the definite surrender of the throne, and of all his highest ambition. And with this crowning proof of his love for David, he returned to love, and cherish, and at last to die with his father. For his golden dream gave place to the storm-cloud of fatal war. It was well that Jonathan died. Possibly even his friendship would not have stood the test of conflicting interests, such as must have arisen when the two friends came to be put forward by their

adherents, as rival candidates for the throne of Israel. As it was, though his race was early run, his life closed a triumphant illustration of the power of true and unselfish and unchanging friendship. While memory endures, men will weep over the pathetic story of Jonathan's self-sacrificing friendship and be animated to emulate the noble example.

The survivor, in this league of love, was not to be outdone. Tenderly he cared for the remains of his friend. In after years he made diligent inquiries, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" But, first of all, yielding to his overpowering emotions, in view of his loss, he took up his harp; and sweeping its plaintive chords with the hand of a master-minstrel, he sang a song that embalms the memory of Jonathan for loving recollection, while friendship lasts, and poetry and music combine to immortalize illustrious lives and deeds. He called it

"THE SONG OF THE BOW."*

"On thy heights, O Israel, is the Gazelle slain!
How are the mighty fallen!

"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon,
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

'Hills of Gilboa, no dew, no rain, come on you, devoted fields,
For there was stained the bow of the mighty,
Saul's bow, never anointed with oil.

* Kitto's "Daily Bible Readings," Vol. IV., page 294.

"From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan turned not aside,
And the sword of Saul came not back empty.

"Saul and Jonathan! lovely and pleasant were ye in life,
And in death ye were not divided.
Swifter than eagles, stronger than lions, were they.

"Daughters of Israel, weep ye far Saul:
He arrayed you pleasantly in scarlet;
He put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

"*How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle,*
O Jonathan, slain in thy high places.

"O Jonathan, my brother, I am grieved for thee:
Very pleasant wast thou to me—
Wonderful was thy love, passing the love of women.

"*How are the mighty fallen,*
And the weapons of war perished!"

Such is the illustration of friendship furnished by the story of David and Jonathan. A friendship like this, providentially ordered, and with Divinely adapted and mutual sympathies, must ever be a blessing to both parties. In the varying vicissitudes and experiences of years, it may be sorely tried,—indeed it must be tested, to be of any value. But it shall ultimately triumph over every obstacle, and leave the hearts of those who share the ennobling passion purified and even transformed by its holy presence.

Our reflections upon this theme, as thus illustrated, will have fulfilled their purpose, only, if they shall lead us to esteem more highly than we have done the charac-

ter of Jonathan. The fame of David rests upon other noble qualities; but the prince royal of the house of Saul will always and justly be known in history as "Jonathan, the Friend." And all the affecting incidents of his lovely and self-sacrificing life will serve their highest purpose, if we are led to trace in them the life and love of the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Like Jonathan our blessed Lord was the crown-prince in the kingdom of God. He was the fairest of men, "the chiefest among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely." Like Jonathan He gave up His throne—that He might share it with the lowly. Like Jonathan He set His love upon us—but for no masterly fight of ours with His and our enemies. Yet every conflict and victory of ours rejoices His heart far more than did David's triumph over Goliath make glad the heart of Jonathan. Like Jonathan He puts His robe upon us, and arms us for the battle. Like Jonathan, though now in the court of His Father, He sympathizes with us in all the trials of our wandering, and makes continual and powerful intercession for us. Like Jonathan He went down to death for us to reconcile the conflicting claims of love and law. Surely then, with far more emphasis than David sang of Jonathan, may we sing of our best beloved Friend and Saviour,

"Thy love to me was wonderful,—was wonderful."

IX.

ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

THE ministry of Elijah and Elisha extended over a period of nearly one hundred years. In one respect this couple differ from all the other related characters of this series;—their public life was not to any great extent contemporaneous. The one took up the duties of the prophetical office where the other put them down. The ministry of each was principally confined to the northern kingdom,—that of the Ten Tribes. Their joint labors covered the reigns of six kings, and had to do with one of the most corrupt and profligate periods of the Israelitish Monarchy.

When Elijah first appeared in the history, the great national breach of the Second Commandment, inaugurated by Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, in the worship of the calves as symbols of Jehovah, had given place to the more open idolatry, in violation of the First Commandment, of another god in the worship of Baal. This apostasy of Israel had been brought about by the infamous Jezebel, the Zidonian wife of King Ahab. She was a woman, as would seem, of great beauty of person, combined with an astonishing force of character,—an imperiousness of will, inspired by an unscrupulous spirit

that was absolutely diabolical,—with which she twisted her wicked and weaker-minded husband around her finger. She was the incarnation of wickedness. She instituted the first religious persecution of which history gives us any information. Her influence poisoned all Israel, and extended over the entire century, while she remains to the very end of the canon of Scripture the type of all seductive, corrupting, and persecuting powers.

To meet this deplorable state of things among His ancient covenant people, God raised up the two men whose names are now before us,—Elijah the Tishbite, and Elisha the son of Shaphat. The ministry of the first covered a period of thirty-three years, that of the second of nearly sixty. Never were two men more unlike; and their public life answers to this dissimilarity.

More of mystery and even romance gathers around Elijah than about any other Old Testament character. He bursts upon the scene of his future labors, with the suddenness and startling effect of a thunder-bolt. He disappears as suddenly in a whirlwind and chariot of fire.* In his rare, sudden, and brief appearances—in his undaunted courage and fiery zeal—in the brilliancy of his triumphs—in the pathos of his despondency—and in the glory of his final departure, standing alone among all sacred characters, he has been fittingly named "the prophet of fire." Born probably somewhere in the mountainous region of Gilead, on the eastern side of the Jordan, he resembles in some respects the great free-booter judge of Israel in earlier days, whose native re-

* See Grove's article, "Elijah," in Smith's Bible Dictionary.

gion was the same district. The unflinching sternness of Jephthah is vividly reproduced in the Tishbite Reformer.

Elijah discloses, also, many of the distinctive traits of the modern Bedouin Arabs—children of the desert. In his hairy skin, and heavy locks, and shaggy mantle, he is the very image of those scourges of the Holy Land. Like theirs, also, was his power of endurance, exhibited in his manifold journeyings, and especially in that wonderful feat, when from the base of Carmel with girded loins he ran before the king's chariot, flying from the storm and rain, the long sixteen miles to Jezreel. Like them, also, he came and went with apparently an almost supernatural celerity. As a meteor he drops down before the king, with his words of denunciation, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word"; and then he disappears. Like an apparition the strange weird form confronts the king going into his unlawful possession, the vineyard of Naboth. And in dismay the startled sovereign cries out, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" Delivering the terrible message of his Master, the child of the desert vanishes as quickly as he came. These natural characteristics of the Tishbite Bedouin were dignified and ennobled, but not removed by his Divine commission as the Lord's Prophet.

Turning now from Elijah to his successor, the most superficial comparison will show that we have an entirely different man to deal with in Elisha. We meet him first, not in the wild and mountainous district of Gilead, but in the rich, fertile, and cultivated valley of the Jor-

dan, and as a wealthy citizen of the town of Abel-Meholah. "The sacred history conducts us to his house and family. We are made acquainted with his occupation and connections. We behold him at his plough as a common husbandman,—as one whose feelings and experience are much the same as those of ordinary men. He is a man who participates in all our relative circumstances. He, like ourselves, is closely allied by blood, affection, and tenderness to the circle in which he lives. He is a stranger to none of the sensibilities of our common nature. He can feel the pain of separation, and taking leave of friends. In his bosom beats, in every respect, the heart of an ordinary member of the family circle. We can venture familiarly to approach him, and we feel our hearts drawn to him in so doing. It is not so with Elijah. He steps forth, gigantically conspicuous above his age and generation. There is an imposing majesty in his whole character, which keeps everything about him at a distance." *

As we might suppose, the difference between Elijah and Elisha appears in their public life, as much as in their personal characteristics. The ministry of the one was a tornado, sweeping over the land, awakening and desolating. That of the other was like the steady blowing of a balmy Southern breeze, bringing life and gladness to a frozen world. Their official labors answered well to their respective names. "Elijah" means "My God of power"; and his life is full of manifestations of supernatural power. "Elisha" signifies "My God is

* Krummacher's "Elijah the Tishbite," page 255.

salvation"; and such was his public career. It was a ministry of salvation. Elijah was a destroyer; Elisha a healer. The miracles of the one were, for the most part, wonder-works of judgment; those of the other were, for the most part, miracles of mercy. The official life of the one, like a mountain torrent,—like the Jordan itself, hurried tumultuously along and was soon ended. That of the other, more like the Nile than the Jordan, moved more slowly and quietly along, more fertilizing, and blessed, and not less powerful. Thirty years were enough for the one; sixty years were required for the work of the other.

Elijah appears in his glory in the trial by fire upon Mt. Carmel. It is the acme and culmination of his illustrious career. It is the most thoroughly representative scene in his entire life. He was alone. As he supposed, he was almost the only servant of Jehovah in the whole kingdom. And yet Elijah is bold enough to challenge the whole host of idolaters and priests of Baal. He said to the king, "Send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." He dares to meet them upon their own ground; for Baal was the sun-god, or god of fire. And his challenge is, "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God." He dares to give his enemies every advantage in the contest. The false priests and prophets shall have the first and most favorable opportunity to secure the flaming answer from the skies. And when Elijah's turn came, he will give them still every advantage. And so again and again the altar

and sacrifice of the lone prophet is deluged with water. And only now, after his enemies have signally failed, and every possible suspicion of fraud is removed from his offering, does Elijah come forward with his simple and believing prayer, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." The prayer was ended; and immediately the fire came down and consumed the prophet's sacrifice. The people were astonished, and, falling upon their faces, shouted, "Jehovah, he is the God! Jehovah, he is the God!" Single-handed and alone Elijah met them all; and in the omnipotence of Jehovah the God of Israel, he conquered. It was a day of grand triumph for the prophet of fire. He seems to have expected that it would work a revolution in the kingdom, overthrow idolatry, and lead to a thorough reformation of true religion. We shall yet have occasion to notice the prophet's great disappointment in this respect.

We search in vain for any such central and decisive contest in the life of Elisha. Indeed, we hardly meet any evidence whatever of the existence of a contest between this prophet and the idolatrous tendency of his times. Elijah's ministry was a constant fretting and chafing with this spirit, especially as exhibited by the rulers. We find nothing of the kind in the ministry of Elisha. He, too, came into contact with kings: but no fiery denunciation of their sins comes from his lips. His

life is full of charming incidents; but it makes no such grand impression upon us as Elijah's does. The narrative is full of interest, when it tells of Naaman the Syrian leper, and of simple pathos, where it details the experiences of the man of God in the house of the Shunamite; but it never rises to the intense tragic interest of Elijah's triumph on Carmel, nor sinks to the level of his despondency at Horeb. Yet this is the law of all history. The most uninteresting annals of a people refer to their most happy and prosperous times. Elisha's ministry, less remarkable, was more fruitful than Elijah's.

And yet the ministry of Elijah was not in vain. Nor was it even less necessary than his successor's. We shall misjudge Elijah's life, if we count it a failure, as compared with Elisha's. The upturnings of spring are not so evidently fruitful as the quiet growth and ripening of summer: yet where were the latter without the former? It is safe to say that Elisha harvested Elijah's sowing. This, too, is no uncommon occurrence. God is evermore sending forth His servants in this order. The Elijahs go before the Elishas. To reverse the order would be to send autumn before spring. God makes no such mistake.

To a church oftentimes God sends an Elijah, — a prophet of fire. His ministry is like a storm in the world of nature. He proclaims the law and all its terrors with clearness and power. With strong unswerving ploughshare he breaks up the fallow ground. The results are not doubtful; and they are promising. Men's consciences are troubled. Their carnal peace is disturbed. With vague expectations they begin to probe

their own spirits. And the most casual inspection of the state of things in such a church would lead one to say, Such a ministry will be greatly rewarded. But as a matter of fact, it is comparatively barren of results. Following such a man of God comes an Elisha. The first swing of his scythe brings down the ripened grain. No such tumult and commotion attend this ministry as was witnessed in the other and earlier instance; but from the first it is laden with blessing to all who come under its benign influences.

This difference in results is largely traceable to the difference in the men. As a general rule, ministers are either one or the other. At least, they are strongest either in the direction of Elijah's strength, or of Elisha's. They are exceedingly rare who approach the many-sidedness of our Lord,—who are Elijahs and Elishas combined. Not many such are made. It is vain to seek for them. It is vain to expect the one to be the other. Something, it is true, may be accomplished by effort and experience; but the original nature is there still. The messenger of God is usually either a Boanerges, or a Barnabas—a son of thunder, or a son of consolation. He is either an Elijah, or an Elisha,—a messenger of the "God of power," or of the "God of salvation." His great strength lies in preaching either the law, or the Gospel.

We can not but notice the parallel between Elijah and John the Baptist. Indeed, we have the Divine warrant for saying that John is the Elijah of the New Testament. The two men resembled each other in character. Both were men who lived apart from their fellow-men.

Both were similarly clad, and were brought up in the wilderness. The key-note of the ministry of each was the one word "Repent." Both visited the sins and corruptions of their times with unsparing denunciations. Both rebuked the profligacy of kings with unflinching boldness. Both awakened an astonishing degree of interest and even excitement throughout the entire land. Both saw this interest die away in seemingly utter—at least comparative—fruitlessness. Both, at one period of their respective ministries, succeeding their greatest triumphs, were plunged into the deepest despondency. Both could find the reason of their discouragement in mistaken notions of the way in which the kingdom of God is to be established on earth. And both introduced a ministry of far quieter character, but of vastly more productive power.

Can we not, also, in some measure trace a similar parallel between the ministry of Elisha, and that of our Lord Jesus Christ? In both cases, a ministry of the "God of salvation," is it altogether a fancy that sees in the prophet an adumbration of his Lord? The one, as the other, lived as a man among men, not like Elijah apart from men, ascetic—an anchorite—but full of human sympathies, and entering into all the minutiæ of a suffering and sorrowing life. The miracles of the one, as of the other, were generally of a merciful character,—healing the sick, giving bread to the hungry, and raising the dead. The one, as the other, seldom uttered the language of threatening; and, trusting rather to the silent and pervasive power of truth, scattered in quietness and gentleness the seed of eternal life.

We need not trace the parallel any further. It is of more importance for us to attend to some of the lessons of this contrast between these two prophets of Israel,—Elijah and Elisha. As we might suppose, this part of the subject is fruitful in suggestions of inestimable value.

I. *For one thing, we must not judge the condition of the spiritual kingdom by external appearances.* This was Elijah's mistake. The state of true religion in Israel was bad enough, no doubt; but to Elijah's mind it was vastly worse than the actual fact. He was brought in contact with the rulers, and saw chiefly the outward and formal condition of the church: and he thought it was a mass of corruption, that all men had become apostate, and that he only was left of all the servants of the true God. And, therefore, he was overwhelmed with discouragement. Alone at the cave's mouth in Horeb, he cried in bitter agony to Jehovah for help Divine. But the prophet was mistaken. Beneath all the godlessness and profligacy of men in official station, there was an undercurrent of humble and abiding loyalty to the God of Israel. Seven thousand, at least, were there, who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

This lesson is pertinent to our times, as truly as to the prophet's day. Some of us, perhaps, may be in danger of committing Elijah's mistake. The absence of manifest spiritual power in the churches, and the repeated and shameless falls of men in the ministry, and the alleged and widely believed defection of men, of high official position, from the path of integrity;—all these things, it can not be denied, are leading many to ask in alarm whether the Church of Christ is not herself

drifting from her moorings, and whether the spirit of true religion is not dying out of a nominally Christian land. We need not be alarmed: and we shall not be, if we look below the surface. In our days, as in the days of the prophet, we shall not find true religion flourishing among the great ones of the earth, and on the face of society. It is in lowly hearts, and in the quiet family life of tens of thousands of people, that we shall find the most convincing proofs that the Spirit of life and grace still dwells with His chosen Church.

This fact it is of immense moment for us to consider, not only that we may correctly judge of the Church's condition; but also, and especially, that we may be able to take the most efficient steps to arrest the incipient decay of her spiritual life. The dying branches on the great tree will be marked by two notable characteristics,—the absence of fruit, and the presence of colors painted by the angel of death. And there may be many of them on the grand old trunk; while yet the tree lives, and brings forth abundant fruit. But when the tree begins to die at the root, the end is sad, but inevitable. In like manner there may be godlessness and formality and worldliness on the high places of the land; while a true and vital Christianity may nevertheless flourish in a multitude of places throughout the country. But when piety dies out of lowly hearts and homes,—when the holy influences of the Sabbath become only a memory in the household,—when the family altars begin to crumble,—when the love of the dying Christ ceases to be a benison to the heart,—and when purity, truth, and charity cease to mark the dealings of man with man;—

then, indeed, may we begin to lose hope for the cause of Christ on earth. The tree is dying at the root. Only the most vigorous and combined Divine forces and human activities can arrest the process of decay and send forth the currents of a new and better life.

Would we then give the Church new life and power in the earth? We shall not act wisely in seeking for her the places of honor and might among the great ones of the world. The fire burns best when kindled from below. The work must begin at home. In the heart of the individual, in the privacy of the family circle, and in the faithful praying band, the process of invigoration and reviving must begin. The ever-widening waves may wash most distant shores; but they must start from the one center.

This suggests another lesson from the lives and times of these prophets of Israel, equally pertinent to our modern days, viz.—

II. *We must not misjudge God's way of building up His Church in the world.* The vision of Horeb is full of instruction for all time. The whirlwind, and the earthquake, and the fire may pass over the land, and accomplish their Divine Master's purposes. But the work of upbuilding and salvation must be done by "the still small voice." "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." Its grandest triumphs are not to be seen in the astonished multitude before the trial by fire; but in the unassuming ministry of Elisha,—not in the hosannas of rejoicing thousands on Olivet, but in the burning hearts of the lowly company that gathered around the once stricken and now

risen Saviour. The true temple of the Prince of Peace must rise evermore through the ages, "without the noise of hammer, or axe, or any tool of iron." Silently, slowly, and surely it shall grow to its glorious completion.

How slow we are to learn this lesson! And how humbling it is to the pride of man to have to learn it! We are born materialists. We take the most delight in that which we can see and hear and handle. That progress of the Church, therefore, which we can measure with our materialistic standards, we can appreciate. Those methods, of building up and extending the kingdom of Christ, which our senses can lay hold of, we believe in. But all other progress and methods of progress we distrust, and turn away from with disappointment. We must see the scaffolding about the building,—we must hear the noise of hammer, and axe, and every tool of iron,—we must ourselves have the handling of those tools,—or we can not believe that the temple is rising to its beautiful and preappointed perfectness.

This is the grievous mistake of men of the world. They judge of the advance of the cause of the Lord on earth by the noise that is made. They are accustomed to regard those only as accomplishing anything whose names are constantly before the public, and upon whose ministry the godless, and, alas! unhungering thousands wait. But Christian people ought to be delivered from such an error and sin,—for sin it is. The true, spiritual, and abiding work of the Church is ever done in quietness. The Church of God, unlike the iceberg in every other respect, must resemble it in one. Its glittering, snowy pinnacles may pierce the sky and point to the

stars; but by far the larger part must always lie beneath the waves. So long as this is so, she will ride the stormiest sea in safety, and with a grand triumph; but when it ceases to be so, she will certainly topple over in an overwhelming ruin. The quiet, unobserved, unchronicled ministry of Elisha is ever more fruitful than the more notable work of his predecessor. The exciting, tumultuous, and speedy course of John the Baptist is barren of the blessed results that follow the gentle ministry of David's Son and Lord,—the long-expected Christ of God.

Most impressively is this lesson emphasized in the New Testament references to Elijah. In the annals of the Old Testament he is so presented that we get the impression of his unapproachable greatness, which we have been at pains to delineate in the preceding pages. But we get no such idea of him from the allusions of the writers of the New Testament to this prophet. With the single exception in Luke (ix. 54), where reference is made to his calling down fire from heaven, nowhere do the writers of the Gospels and Epistles refer to his works of destruction or portent at all. "They all set forth a very different side of his character to that brought out in the historical narrative. They speak of his being 'a man of like passions with ourselves'; of his kindness to the widow of Sarepta; of his 'restoring all things'; and of his 'turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.'" That which Elijah did in public, and before the king, and through which he becomes so renowned in history,—this is entirely overlooked in the later story. But the things which he did in quietness,

unknown and unobserved of men, and for which they gave him no praise in his own generation,—these are the things seized upon by the New Testament writers; and by these examples from his life is his character commended to our notice and study. In the New Testament conception, Elijah praying for rain, for the distressed and sinful land, on the slope of Carmel, is a more impressive figure than Elijah denouncing the sins of Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth, or slaughtering the priests of Baal and Ashtoreth beside the brook Kishon. In one word, the work of God is best done in silence and quietness.

"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." So must it come to the heart of the unconverted. How difficult for men to believe this! Multitudes are waiting for some wonderful display of Divine power, which shall not only conquer all the opposition of their hearts, but also make its heavenly character and origin unmistakably and publicly manifest. But from year to year they are disappointed; and still in sadness they are waiting. The kingdom never so comes to the heart. Not in the terrors of some miraculous display, but in the gentle pleading and persuasive power of the Holy Spirit's "still small voice,"—in this way only does it come. It is this voice that now perhaps is wooing you, my friend, to Christ, and life, and rest. Oh that you would be persuaded and listen to its quiet and loving tones.

III. *We must learn to distinguish between apparent and real success in doing the Lord's work.* A superficial view of Elijah's life would find the greatest success of his ministry in the tumultuous applause of the

people on Mt. Carmel. A profounder study of his times and work will bring us to a different conclusion. The prophet's real success is to be seen in the silent, loving, and to him unknown fidelity of the seven thousand who obeyed still the Lord God of Israel,—the God whom the prophet worshiped and served. Among them doubtless the faithful life of Elijah, and his bold battle with the enemies of Jehovah, were a tower of strength and defence. It was never given the prophet to know, but who can doubt the fact, that these believing thousands were mightily moulded in character and confirmed in right ways, by the shining example of the lone prophet!

There is an apparent and a real success in the life of every one of us. Let us not be blinded by the glowing appearance of the one, nor discouraged because we can not see the full measure of the other. That father has accomplished what the world calls success, who has educated and trained his son for an ambitious destiny among the great ones of the world. It is nothing to him or to them that his son is absorbingly selfish, and even unscrupulous in the use of means by which to bring about his own advancement. He has nurtured him on this food, and drilled him in the use of all such arts. He has fired his ambition, and stimulated every energy of his nature, to reach forward and grasp the glittering prizes of earthly fame and wealth and pleasure. And when at last the goal is reached, both father and son are congratulated, and congratulate themselves, upon the fine success of their joint endeavors. But in point of fact a more stupendous failure can not be imagined.

That life, so assiduously trained and developed, has come far short of all life's holiest aims and ends. The end sought indeed, has been obtained; but how pitifully small the outcome for a soul of such vast capacities, and fitted for an endless destiny!

That mother to whom God has entrusted the training and guidance of a gifted daughter, accomplishes a real success, who is most anxious to secure the engrafting and growth of spiritual graces upon the character of her child. With unfailing faith and patience she seeks to turn the plastic mind away from the "vain show" of an ease-loving and self-seeking course. Possessing herself a spirit that penetrates to the heart of life, she seeks to have her daughter estimate at their real worth the flatteries of men, and to detect the certain hollowness of those tributes which the world pays to beauty, wit, and station. Having respect to the recompense of the reward, she endeavors to lead her child to choose present self-denial and even affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The long, slow, toiling years pass away; and hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but the great and worthy end is gained at last. The world may look upon that mother's life as a failure; but beyond the stars approving smiles and a welcome plaudit await the faithful servant. That mother's life has been, in the highest, noblest sense of the term, a successful one.

So there is a lesson here for all. For teachers,* who

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* Adapted from Robertson's "Elijah,"—Sermons. Second Series, No. 6.

lay their heads down at night, sickening over their thankless tasks. How difficult to train the youthful mind and heart aright! How slowly the germs of mental and moral character develop themselves in those we are to teach. We must think less of immediate and tangible results, and more of that success which the superficial eye can never see. We must remember the power of indirect influences; those which distil from a life, not from a sudden, brilliant effort. The former seldom fail; the latter often do. Success for all such lies in that invisible influence on character which He alone can read who counted the seven thousand nameless but faithful ones in Israel.

For ministers, too, there is a lesson here. What is ministerial success? Does it consist in crowded churches, —full aisles,—attentive congregations,—the approval of the religious world,—much impression produced,—and a name renowned throughout the land? Elijah thought so: and, when he found out his mistake, and discovered that the applause on Carmel was subsiding into hideous stillness, his heart well-nigh broke with disappointment. God deliver His servants from making the prophet's mistake. God teach His servants that true ministerial success lies not in that which attracts the attention and wins the praises of the world, but in altered and obedient, humble hearts;—work unseen by unspiritual eyes, which yet shall be recognized and acknowledged in the great day of final judgment.

X.

JEHOIADA AND JOASH.

IN the history of Jehoiada and Joash we traverse the darkest period in the chronicles of the monarchy in Jerusalem. We are still in the gloomy century so wonderfully illustrated and illuminated by the contrasted ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah has been taken to heaven in his chariot of fire. His successor is busy discharging the duties of his office in the northern kingdom, when the little Prince Joash is crowned king in Jerusalem; and the men come into view with whom we are now specially concerned.

It was the most critical period for the throne of David of which the historian gives us any information. The southern realm had seen trouble before, and saw much more afterward; but just at this juncture it seemed as if the very promise of God was about to be broken. Jehovah had sworn with a solemn oath to David,—"His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven." The promise was, after all, fulfilled in the unbroken line of David's posterity down to the Messiah's day; and the Lord Christ now sits upon the throne of David forever. But,

at this particular period in the history, the long succession was well-nigh broken, and the seed of David had almost perished from the earth. All had been cut off, save one infant boy, who, through the intervention of Divine Providence, escaped the general massacre. Hid away from all his enemies, though like Moses nourished and brought up in the midst of enemies, he came at last to the throne of his fathers.

The history is full of tragic interest. It is dwelt upon by the inspired penman, as if to emphasize for us its solemn lessons. The origin of these troublous times, and of their brood of evils, is worthy of consideration. Like many godly people in our day, who, for temporal gain, seek worldly connections for their children, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, himself a good and able sovereign, and a true servant of Jehovah, sought an alliance for his family with the idolatrous house of Ahab. His motive was probably a good one. He seems to have hoped that thus he might heal the schism between Judah and Israel, and bring back the revolted tribes to their former allegiance to the monarchy in Jerusalem, and to the worship of Jehovah in the services of the temple. So he sought in marriage for his son Jehoram, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel—that Zidonian Jezebel, whose influence, as we have already seen, was so disastrous to the spiritual welfare of Israel. Athaliah was the worthy daughter of such a mother.

From that union, as from a bloody fountain, flows a crimson tide, of which history to that time furnishes perhaps no parallel. Royal blood was hardly ever shed so profusely as during the twenty-five years succeeding

Jehoram's accession to the throne of Judah. Instigated, in all probability, by his wife, he signalized his assumption of regal powers by killing all his brethren, the sons of Jehoshaphat. In the course of time, the Arabians—Bedouins of the desert probably—carried away captive all of Jehoram's children, except his youngest son, Ahaziah. In the northern kingdom, almost at the same time, Jehu destroyed all the house of Ahab, except Athaliah, Jehoram's wife; and soon after also killed his only remaining son, Ahaziah. And now the daughter of Jezebel, Athaliah, true to her nature and training, finding her husband dead, and her son dead, impelled partly by revenge, and more perhaps by that lust for power, which she had inherited from her mother, rose up, and "destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah"; and grasped the reigns of supreme dominion for herself. It was the first change in the dynasty that had ruled in Jerusalem, while in the northern kingdom the fourth distinct family now occupied the throne.

But God will not suffer His promise to be broken. For a little while the usurper may hold her place and power; but the wheel of Providence is already beginning to revolve, which shall bring her to the dust. Thus it came about. Jehoshabeath, half-sister of the dead Ahaziah, and daughter of the usurper's husband, had married Jehoiada the priest, who, perhaps about this time, became the High-Priest. It was she who took the infant Joash, son of Ahaziah, and concealed him in a bed-chamber in the temple. And there he remained, with his nurse, securely cared for in that strange obscurity, for six years. The idolatrous Athaliah worshiped

in the temple of Baal, and of course never visited the sanctuary of Jehovah. So, for years, by the friends appointed of God, Joash was nurtured. And, when seven years old, by the wise counsels and successful plans of Jehoiada the priest, he was securely seated upon the throne of David. The bold, bad queen, defiant to the last like her mother before her, like her also met her doom in ignominy and blood. For forty years Joash reigned in Jerusalem. During the earlier, perhaps the larger, part of his reign, he received the counsel and assistance of his benefactor. The two men—Jehoiada and Joash—are now before us: let us look at them.

Jehoiada is a man well advanced in years when his nephew comes to the throne. He was a man of unflinching uprightness, and devoted religious principle. His position in the wicked capital, during the reign of the last king, and the usurpation of Athaliah, had been one of extreme difficulty. In some respects, it resembled that of Joseph in Egypt, and of Obadiah in the councils of Ahab, and of Daniel in the court of Babylon. In all these instances, these counsellors of kings seem to stand forth almost alone, the unwavering and acknowledged servants of the Most High God, in the midst of abounding idolatry. The other three manifested such extraordinary executive talents, that, notwithstanding their devotion to the true religion, they were regarded as indispensable to the service of their idol-worshiping rulers. Jehoiada had not yet been called to the responsible post of prime minister in the court of Jerusalem. But he was as well qualified for it as Joseph or Obadiah had been, or as Daniel afterward became.

But up to the reign of Joash, no such position had been offered to the able and pious priest. The former king, Ahaziah, father of Joash, had such a counsellor as the sacred narrative gives to no other sovereign of either Judah or Israel. The inspired penman says, "His mother"—the infamous Athaliah—"was his counsellor to do wickedly!"

With the accession of Joash to the throne, a new order of things is instituted. Jehoiada had done much for the youthful sovereign. He had guarded his life and interests from the rapacious monster who had destroyed all the other children of her own son. He had established him in his kingdom. He had caused the overthrow and death of the usurper. And now, having done so much for his nephew, it was but natural that Jehoiada should be called to the position of chief counsellor to the young king. Indeed, he was virtually regent during the minority of his relative. It seems probable that for nearly twenty-five years of the forty during which Joash occupied the throne, Jehoiada the priest was his counsellor to do that which was right. And he did it, though not with a perfect heart. The temple of Baal was broken down: and that daring form of idolatry by which Judah was becoming so intimately allied to Israel, was, for the time, exterminated. The temple of Jehovah was repaired,—the true worship was reorganized,—and the people were called to renew their solemn covenant to be Jehovah's servants. The reformation was less extensive and thorough than those in the succeeding reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah; but it was a great improvement upon the godlessness and corruption of Athaliah's

day. It did not, however, reach the masses of the people; and it seems to have gone as far as it did, mainly through the untiring efforts of one man. That one man was Jehoiada the priest. We shall yet have occasion to observe why it failed.

Under the sovereignty of Joash, and especially under the wise and benign counsels of his uncle, the kingdom of Judah flourished in quietness for a quarter of a century. In all external appearances the true religion continued to prosper. But good men must die; and the time came for Jehoiada to be gathered to his fathers. Having attained a fulness of years and honors alike unstained, he died at a good old age. The people, as is not unusual, unwilling to follow his good counsels, with a whole heart, while he was living, took occasion of his death to heap up extraordinary honors upon his memory. The only one in the entire history to whom this mark of high respect was shown, "they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house."

Joash, bereft now of his wise and able counsellor, is left to reign alone. A result is reached, not unlike that which marked the fall of Aaron before Mt. Sinai. The priest and the king had both been leaning upon a stronger arm. And, when the support of a Moses and a Jehoiada was taken away, they fell. And both were inexcusable. Had Joash fallen in his earlier years, we should have felt more pity for him. Jehoiada himself may have been somewhat to blame. With great administrative abilities himself, he may have lifted the burden too much from the shoulders of his nephew, so that he

came to the sole exercise of authority unprepared for it. But he ought to have been prepared. The long years of tutelage under his uncle, and the memory of his example, should have fitted him thoroughly for wisely administering the complicated affairs of the realm. But they did not.

Upon the death of the old high-priest, it soon became apparent that he had been the mainspring of the great religious reformation. Under the king's personal influence a new *régime* is allowed. As in the days of Rehoboam, in the preceding century, the young men—nobles and princes of the blood—gathered around the yet young sovereign; and with artful flatteries seduced him from the safe following of the wise counsels of Jehoiada. The worshipers of idols multiplied, having now, first the royal permission, and then the royal sanction, for their impure and abominable rites. The house of the Lord was again forsaken. The throne was committed to all the impiety and corruption which at first it had condemned. Joash went even further. Despising the counsels of his deceased uncle, he also mocked the messengers of Jehovah; and crowned the iniquity of his life, by ordering to be stoned to death the son of his benefactor, who came as a prophet, with words of warning from the God of Israel.

This last event seems to have made a deep impression upon even that wicked generation. And, as if it were the last great act of national impiety, it is coupled by Christ with the murder of Abel—the extremes of a bloody record written against the guilty Jewish people;—"That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the

earth, from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." The malediction of the dying prophet was expressed in the mildest words. He simply said, "The Lord look upon it, and require it." But it proved a curse, under the weight of which the guilty sovereign went hastening to a violent death and a dishonorable grave. His enemies prevailed against him. The Lord smote him with sore diseases—the natural punishment, perhaps, of an impure life. His own servants conspired against him; and, entering the bed-chamber of the invalid, slew him there, avenging thus the blood of the son of his benefactor. And even in his burial he was treated with ignominy. That burial was in marked contrast with the funeral of his aged and honored counsellor. Jehoiada was not of royal blood, but he was buried among the kings. But Joash, though a prince of the house of David, is denied a sepulchre among his royal fathers. Like his grandfather before him, he "departed without being desired." His very name is one of three that are significantly blotted out of the genealogical table of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. A dreadful end was this of a life and reign which began so auspiciously and promised so well! The sad story is full of meaning. It is fraught with lessons of vast moment, to the instruction of which we shall do well to take solemn heed. A review of the salient points of this history will be sufficient to show,

I. *For one thing, that zeal for the external affairs of religion is not necessarily religion.* We have already seen that Jehoiada was the principal agent in carrying

on the religious reformation of the kingdom. At the very beginning, when they brought forth the young king from his six years' concealment in the temple, and put the crown upon him, it was Jehoiada who "gave him the testimony,"—that is, put in his hands the copy of the law of God, which the king was required by the Mosaic institutes to have and to read. It was Jehoiada who made "a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the LORD'S people." It was the faithful Jehoiada who appointed again the offices of the house of the Lord, as "they had been ordained by David." And it was his assiduous care that nothing impure should enter into the holy precincts of the temple, where Jehovah had said He would set His own holy name. Jehoiada did all this. Joash was rather a passive instrument in his hands, not only while he was young, but also later in his history.

In the progress of the work, however, the young king became very zealous for the speedy refitting of the temple. He was so anxious to have the outward form of worship reorganized, that he even took it upon himself to rebuke the high-priest Jehoiada for the delay which characterized the work. The language of the record is brief, but very suggestive. "It came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord. And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not. And the king called for

Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in, out of Judah and Jerusalem, the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the Lord, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?" In the light of Jehoiada's former well-known zeal, and of the king's subsequent conduct, the scene here portrayed is both curious and instructive.

Knowing what we now do of the king's real character, we might say, at first thought, in the language of the proverb, "Satan is rebuking sin." And such judgment would not perhaps be far wrong. Yet, in so saying, we may misunderstand and misjudge the character of Joash (as indeed also that of his uncle) at this period of his life. No matter what he afterward became, he was not, at this time, perhaps, either a hypocrite or a very bad man. He was young and zealous. Though largely under the influence of Jehoiada, he seems to have thought his uncle too slow in this particular direction. Like some young men of some other times, he had the impression that the administration would be benefited by a little infusion of young blood.

But, like all misguided zealots, his mind was most occupied with the appearance of religious matters. He was concerned, not so much about the low state of religion throughout the kingdom, as about the dilapidated condition of the temple. His uncle was wiser because more spiritually minded. He saw that the external appearance would take its form from the internal state of religion. Leaving the former, therefore, for the present, he gave his attention chiefly to the latter. He was in no

hurry about repairing the temple, but aimed to quicken the religious life of the people. He knew that this rehabilitation of the house of God would come in due time as the natural and inevitable outgrowth of this revival of interest in the service of God.

Just here the superficial religious zeal of the young king came in to derange the far-sighted plan of Jehoiada. He must "set the house of God in his state." And under his influence the attention of the people was turned away from genuine and thorough penitence for their sins and reformation of their lives, to the merely material refitting of the temple. This was a work they could do without any specially spiritual frame of mind. And, of course therefore, it was a work much more congenial to their carnal hearts; while yet it served as an anodyne to their consciences. They were not really turning from their darling sins; and still they could say, as Jehu was saying in Samaria about this same period, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." It seems not unlikely that the comparative failure of the religious reform was, in a large measure, due to this disastrous prevalence of superficial zeal.

The world is full of Joashes! A multitude they are, who seem to think of the Church as a great external kingdom, rather than as an invisible and spiritual realm. Their labors are expended, not in deepening the religious life of Zion, but in building up her outer walls. The result is inevitable. The outside is beautiful. But beneath and within the fair exterior, an occasional glimpse will disclose an alarming state of impurity. The Church is not a temple of mere brick and stone, to be built up

from the outside! It is rather a living tree, whose leaves are for "the healing of the nations." Nourish and invigorate the living sap that flows through every member, and you need not trouble yourself to be setting on a branch here and there from the outside! By the law of its own interior life, it will grow to a glorious beauty and a spiritual perfectness! The great want of the Church, of our day, is not more stones in the wall, but more of the Holy Spirit in her members! We need less of the influence of Joash, and more of the labors of Jehoiada!

II. *For another thing, that religious principle alone can be a sufficient safeguard for us, especially when surrounded by flatterers.* Joash is, in this respect, a suggestive warning to young men and women. With most auspicious beginnings, his life terminated disastrously and terribly. Carefully nurtured and religiously trained, he yet came to the throne destitute of religious principle. As soon, therefore, as the crowd of parasites and flatterers could get access to him (which they succeeded in doing on the death of Jehoiada), they found it no difficult task to turn his head with their artful adulations. He had no substructure of solid piety in his character; and when the incoming wave of unholy influences reached him, it swept him from his moorings.

The force of this royal example lies in the fact, that Joash was not by any means a monster of wickedness, when, after the death of Jehoiada, "the princes of Judah came and made obeisance to the king." He was, on the whole, a well-disposed young man, such as we may meet every day. They come, as we say, from our "best

families." They are children, it may be, of religious people. Their early years are filled with memories of Gospel truth. But possessed of rather negative characteristics, easily influenced by their companions, too amiable and good-natured to say No, and possessing probably more money than is good for them, they become the easy prey of their designing comrades. These are like vultures scenting the carcass afar off. With an unerring instinct they crowd around him whom they call 'their friend,' that they may gorge themselves upon his substance. Like vampires, they gather from every quarter around their unsuspecting victim; and, fanning him with gentlest zephyrs, gradually suck his life's blood. They feed the flame of his vanity and self-importance, while they debauch his moral nature; and forsake him at last, only when he has come to poverty,—a broken wreck stranded on the desolate shores of infamy and crime. This was the ruin of Joash. For the want of sustaining religious principle, the amiable and "mighty good kind of a young man" speedily ran his course of sin down to the lowest level; and, finally, like his grandfather before him, "departed without being desired."

One other lesson from the contrasted lives of Joash and Jehoiada must not be overlooked by us, viz.—

III. *We see the necessity of self-reliance in a religious life.* Of course, we mean self-reliance in relation to men. We never can rely too much upon God. The advantages of Christian communion and church society we must fully appreciate. God, who in the beginning "saw that it was not good for man to be alone," and who "setteth the solitary in families," has

wisely appointed that our best interests and greatest progress in holy living shall be secured in the "household of faith." And the day is gone by when any considerable body of men are willing to advocate turning aside to a hermit's cell, to attain greater sanctity of heart or of life. The great danger of our day is in the opposite direction. Our Christian life is too public. It is so easy to depend upon others, and to seek from them that spiritual quickening and increasing warmth of spiritual affections which can come only from the Holy Spirit. In the closeness and continuity of our Christian fellowship in these days, it is not difficult to secure for our devotion a factitious light and heat, which to many shall be the evident token of His presence and blessing, who alone baptizes with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

While not undervaluing the advantages of fellowship with our brethren, we need seriously to ponder the question, How much does our religion depend upon our circumstances? Many in our day are like Joash,—good, or bad, according to their surroundings. Under the influence of pious Jehoiadas they are pious. Under the influence of wicked flatterers they are wicked. They are chameleon Christians: they take their color from the tree or branch to which they cling. Always leaning upon others, they are unable to stand alone. And the prevailing characteristics of their religious life are as variable as the influences to which they become subject. And if, at any time, they should be thrown into worldly circumstances and Christless society, you would never suspect that they were not in full sympathy with their surroundings, and with their unbelieving companions.

Their life and character take shape and coloring from the influences round about them.

Even if such people do not go so far as to deny their Christian name and hope, yet are they certain to fall when the strong support on which they have been leaning is taken away from them. When Jehoiada dies Joash is ruined. A few more years are all that is needed to tell the story. A suggestive incident, illustrative of this, is told of Dr. Finley, the first President of the College of New Jersey. He had an acquaintance and friend to whom he was much attached, and who in most respects seemed worthy of the President's regard. But he was fast losing control of himself, and becoming addicted to the use of intoxicating liquors. Dr. Finley saw the danger of his friend, and determined, if possible, to save him. To accomplish this end, he exerted all the powers of his great intellect, and all the resources of learning that he could bring to bear upon his companion. He was successful; and for years had the pleasure of seeing his friend successfully resisting his great temptation, and living an upright and apparently consistent Christian life. He uniformly attributed his rescue to the kind attentions of his learned friend. Unconsciously he came to rely upon Dr. Finley for the strength which he should have sought in God. When at last the President lay upon the bed of death, no one manifested more solicitude for the result than the reformed drunkard. Daily he visited the house, and doubtless often the bedside of his benefactor, eagerly seeking tidings of his welfare. The end came at last: and to his inquiry one morning, "How is Dr. Finley?"

receiving the answer, "He is dead, sir," he turned away with the sad, solemn cry, "Then I am a lost man." He was a true prophet. He had been only a Joash; and when Jehoiada was dead, he gave way to the evil passion which had well-nigh destroyed him. He, too, soon ran his course, and in a few brief years was laid in a drunkard's grave.

God grant that we may have "the root of the matter" within us, that so, when the time of trial comes, we may endure even unto the end. May His good Spirit help us, when removed from all sustaining influences, to remember the significant words, which He inspired and caused to be recorded,—"And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada the priest."

XI.

HAMAN AND MORDECAI.

THE book of Esther, like the book of Ruth, is a small but finished picture. The chronicle opens with three notable scenes. The first is a description, brief but suggestive, of the royal feast, given by the king of Persia. Ahasuerus is the king, whom we know in the Grecian story as the capricious and domineering Xerxes. He had but recently come to the throne. The time here specified was about mid-way between his coronation and his disastrous expedition against the States of Greece. His resources, therefore, had not yet been wasted, as afterward they were, in the foolish extravagances of foreign wars. Lately come to the exercise of sovereign authority, and not old enough, perhaps, to have learned wisdom, and with abundant materials at his command, he gloried in his exalted place and despotic power. He seems to have craved the opportunity for making a public exhibition of his magnificence. He was himself a lover of feasting and revelry. He knew no better way to show forth his grandeur than to proclaim a festal season "unto all his princes and servants, the power of Persia and Media, with the nobles and princes of the provinces."

This, therefore, he did. For six months the grandees of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces gathered in "Shushan the palace," and celebrated the royal festivities. But even this display did not satisfy the passionate extravagance of the king. For seven days longer the festal season must continue. The joyful time must culminate in a blaze of glory. All the people of the capital were to be there, both great and small. By royal command the banquet was spread in "the court of the garden of the king's palace." It was a magnificent place for such a feast, and doubtless was specially fitted up for such a memorable occasion. The brief language of the annalist gives us but a momentary glimpse of a scene, which in gorgeousness of coloring and magnificence of appointments in every way, rivals the brightest visions of the Arabian Nights. "There were white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble. The beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another), and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king." The historian tells us, indeed, that the drinking was according to law; "none did compel; for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure." But we may be sure that there was hardly any less of it because it was voluntary. It was a grand debauch. For one week the capital gave itself up to drinking and revelry.

In this fact we have the introduction and explanation

of the second scene in this oriental story. On the seventh and last day of the great feast, "when the heart of the king was merry with wine," Ahasuerus sent for Vashti. The queen had been in full sympathy with the royal desire and purpose to make the great festival one of conspicuous and universal pleasure. All that a woman might properly do to enhance the general joy, she was quite willing to undertake. And so it came about that, while the king was feasting the nobles of his realm and the people of his capital, the queen was also giving a feast and time of joy to "the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus." But now the days of revelry have reached their culmination. The king and all the grandees of his empire are filled with wine. It was the sudden freak of a drunken man, applauded doubtless to the echo by his equally drunken courtiers, to command his chamberlains "to bring Vashti the queen before the king, with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to look on." Before a vast assembly of drunken revellers she was called to crown the festival with an exhibition of her personal charms. It was an unseemly thing to require.

What it signified we may gather perhaps from a similar scene in a later day. Herod the king also made a feast for "his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee." They, too, became a set of drunken revellers: and before them in such a state, Herodias, who had her own ends to gain, sent her young and beautiful daughter to gratify the sensual crowd with the meretricious arts of a dancing-girl. Drunkenness and lust, we may

be sure, were allied sins in the court of Xerxes, as well as in the palace of Herod. And it was to gratify the impure eyes of tipsy sensualists that Vashti was now summoned to grace with her queenly beauty the bacchanalian orgies of the palace garden.

Can we wonder that she refused to obey the summons? She could hardly have been blind to the consequences of such a declinature. None knew better than she the despotic power of the Persian monarch, and the peril and danger of giving him any offence. For smaller faults than hers the heads of other queens had rolled from the flashing blade of the executioner's scimetar. At the very least she could not expect anything less than the forfeiture of the royal favor, and the sacrifice of her exalted position. But she did not hesitate. Vashti was a pure-minded as well as beautiful woman; and she would not disgrace herself, no matter what the penalty might be. All honor, we say, to the woman who did not shrink from such a trial, and who, in one brief moment, surrendered the crown of Persia, that she might retain the priceless crown of modesty and virtue.

This was the result. The third scene of the story tells the issue of this day's business. As the curtain lifts once more before our eyes, we behold a solemn conclave of the prime ministers of the kingdom debating the question, how best to prevent Vashti's evil example from so spreading through the empire, that the women everywhere should get the upper hand of the men, and the evil day should come, when "no man could bear rule in his own house." It was surely a subject of vast moment! Such a calamity must be averted at any cost!

The whole scene has a comical look; and we can hardly resist the conviction that these wise men must have been still half-drunk, as, with lugubrious countenances, they sat around the council board, oppressed by this new and peculiar care. But plainly it is no joke with them: and after due deliberation, they come to the sage conclusion that the impending calamities can be averted only by dethroning and discrowning Vashti, and giving "her royal estate unto another that is better than she." So the pure and beautiful queen is sent away, and is heard of no more in the history.

The cause was of the Lord. His providence was shaping Esther's way to the throne, to be the instrument in His hand of saving His people. The particulars of this part of the history are too well known to need any rehearsal here. By divers steps Hadassah, "the myrtle," becomes Esther, "the star." The young Jewess comes to the throne, and Mordecai sits in the king's gate. Soon after the royal feast, in which Xerxes made public acknowledgment of his new queen, Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, appears upon the scene. He speedily becomes the royal favorite. The king promoted him, "and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him." In his rise to power, and the consequent collisions of his interests with those of his rival, the Jew in the king's gate, we find our first lesson from the contrasted lives of Haman and Mordecai:—

I.—The Evils of Discontent.

Haman's rapid advancement to a place of imperial power would be an incredible story in any other than an

oriental despotism. But history, both sacred and profane, is full of illustrations of the facility with which royal favorites have acquired and exercised a more than royal power. And no feature of these illustrations is more noticeable than the wonderful rapidity that often characterizes the promotion of the poor and weak and unknown, to positions of power and influence and fame, the mere hope of which, at one time, would have seemed the wildest dream. The story of Joseph will occur to every one as an illustration of these remarks. He who but yesterday was lying in an apparently hopeless dungeon, is to-day on the steps of the throne; and his word is the law of the king as well as of the mighty kingdom. Egypt has a king indeed; but Joseph sways the sceptre of a sovereign power. Daniel, also, in the court of Babylon, furnishes another instance of the rapid advancement to the place of supreme authority, of one who but recently was altogether unknown and unbefriended.

Haman's speedy promotion to the place of prime minister in the Persian Empire is not, therefore, an improbable occurrence. That he should have conferred upon him almost dictatorial powers, through the blind partiality of the capricious Xerxes, is just what we should have expected from what we know of ancient and oriental despotisms, and expecially from what we know of the character of this monarch himself. So the son of Hammedatha became the greatest man in the Persian Court. The king himself was greater only in the semblance of a royal authority. Haman was the power behind the throne. "And all the king's servants that

were in the king's gate, bowed and reverenced Haman: for so the king had commanded concerning him." With a lordly step he strode through the corridors of the royal palace. With proud and haughty self-gratulations he gathered his family around him and recounted before them the marvellous elements of his greatness. He "told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king." And the climax of his greatness was in the fact that he stood first also, as he supposed, in the eyes of Esther, the queen. It was the last drop in the cup of his happiness, that he, alone of all the nobles and princes of the empire, had been invited to banquet with the king and queen. So great was Haman. Riches, a multitude of children, the royal favor, and a seat at the king's right hand on the highest step of the throne, with even the royal signet ring committed to his keeping;—with all these elements of greatness, it would seem as if he could not be greater were he on the throne. And it would seem as if not one element of happiness could be wanting in such a life.

But Haman was not happy. No man, indeed, in the court of Xerxes was more unhappy than he. The trouble in his mind arose, not as we might have supposed it would arise, from the insecurity of his position, nor from his obvious exposure to the shafts of malice and envy. Haman cared for none of these things. Perhaps he was blinded to their existence and power. The great source of disquietude to the royal favorite was that Mordecai, the Jew, would not do him homage. All men

in the court of Xerxes, however great they were, acknowledged the power of the royal favorite, except his rival. With obsequious obeisance they prostrated themselves before him; "but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." Why Mordecai, otherwise loyal to the king, should in this particular instance have refused obedience to the royal mandate, does not clearly appear. The national and traditional hatred of the Amalekite by the Jew may have had something to do with it. But it is more probable that Mordecai was restrained, by conscientious convictions, from giving that homage and reverence to a fellow-creature which contained elements of worship due to Jehovah, the true God alone.

And so it came about, that, while all others in the court bowed in silence and dread in the august presence of the prime minister, Mordecai sat erect in the king's gate as self-possessed and lofty of soul as was even the son of Hammedatha. It was this that troubled Haman. Rehearsing all the elements of his fame and magnificence to his household, he is lifted up with the grandeur of the prospect. But there is one cloud on the horizon. The ointment is most costly; and its fragrance is to his nostrils as the sweetest incense; but there is one dead fly in the ointment. He turns from all his riches and pleasures and honors with the sorrowful confession of an unhappy and discontented spirit. Very suggestive are his words,—"Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." This one bitter ingredient poisoned all his cup.

What a picture is here furnished of the evils of dis-

contentment! It is a spirit of dissatisfaction and unrest that disquiets not only him who cherishes it, but also all with whom he has anything to do. It has no necessary connection with what one has or has not. It is often found exerting its most baleful influences in the minds of those who are, like Haman, rich and increased with goods. They have everything that heart can wish, except the one thing. With grasping spirit they have reached forth and secured almost (but not) all their hearts' desire. But one thing more would make them supremely happy. So they think; and because that one thing is beyond their power, all they do possess has no element of happiness to their complaining spirits. The one thing wanting overbalances all they have, and wanting it they want everything.

It is to be observed further, also, that discontent has a most intimate connection with others and what they possess. In houses and lands, in flowers and fruits, in pleasures and honors from my fellow-men, I have all that I could desire or hope for; and I am supremely content. But let my neighbor gain, in any of these or other things, something which I have not, and immediately my soul is afflicted with this baleful spirit of discontent. I have as much as I had before; but because my friend has more, I seem to have nothing. What before satisfied me has no such power now: and from the survey of all my possessions I turn with the words of murmuring,—All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see my neighbor in possession of that which I have not.

Still further, it belongs to this evil spirit of discontentment that its chief disquietude arises from the fact

that it can not be supreme. I not only want what my neighbor has, but I want to get it away from him. Part of the pleasure that shall exorcise this evil spirit of discontent is unquestionably the having what no one else can get; but it is an additional part of that pleasure that my neighbor should be deprived of that which was distinctively his. I want it myself, and I want it myself alone: no one shall share it with me. The spirit of discontent will brook no rivalry. It is like Haman in the court of Ahasuerus. There was room enough in that court for both Haman and Mordecai: but this was intolerable to the son of Hammedatha. He must be the sole object of the universal homage. And because he can not secure his end, he is dissatisfied, and can find no enjoyment in all the tokens of the king's favor.

So is it ever with this spirit of discontent. A man has nothing. He suffers from abject and hopeless poverty. He believes if he could but have the necessaries of life, he would be the happiest of men. These necessaries are given him. Is he content? Not by any means! He wishes now for the conveniences of life. They will make him supremely content. They, too, are laid down upon his doorstep. But still he cries for more. What he has received but whets his appetite for something else. He now calls for the luxuries of life. Without them he must be forever miserable. Thus the spirit of discontent grows by what it feeds on. Give a man necessaries, and he wants conveniences; give him conveniences, and he wants luxuries; give him luxuries, and now he is more miserable than when he had nothing.

With all his getting, he has failed to secure the spirit of contentment: and so he must be unhappy.

Another lesson from this oriental story may be of important practical benefit to all of us. We see here,

II.—The Cruelties of a Selfish Ambition.

It was Haman's ambition to stand on the highest place in the Persian realm; and he would stand there alone. A mere creature of the royal favor, he is jealous of any rivalry in the affections of the king. Mordecai the Jew seems to stand in the way of his ambitious purposes. And with remorseless cruelty he determines upon his removal. It is the method in which he proposes to get rid of his enemy that reveals the unsparing ferocity of his nature. "He thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai." The malignant and revengeful spirit that feeds the flame of his ambition is not satisfied with crushing a solitary rival. He will signalize his possession of sovereign power by planting his heel in the blood of an entire race.

But he must first gain the king's consent, before he can thus wreak his cruel vengeance upon his rival's people. The manner in which he gained the royal approval of this diabolical purpose is in keeping with the whole dark tragedy; and it is hardly more discreditable to the prime minister than it is to the sovereign himself. Slander and bribery are the two satanic means by which he expects to accomplish his infamous aims. The first

step in the plot is to stain the fair name of the whole Hebrew people. "And Haman said unto King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws, therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." It was a gratuitous and vile calumny upon an innocent and defenceless people.

But slander alone will not avail to accomplish the evil purposes of the ambitious Haman. And the royal favorite has other and more potent methods of reaching the ear and of gaining the consent of his master. Xerxes needed money. The prodigious extravagance of the Persian Court was fast exhausting the revenues of the empire. It is not improbable also that just now the Persian monarch was preparing for his great, and, as it turned out, disastrous expedition against Greece. Money therefore was an imperative necessity to the royal treasury. No one knew that fact better than Haman. The ambitious favorite had doubtless foreseen the end of all the king's foolish prodigality, and had prepared himself beforehand to strengthen his own power by showing himself able to gratify the royal demands. And now when Haman proposes to accomplish two things so important to the welfare of the kingdom as the destruction of a pestiferous people in the empire, and the replenishment of the royal treasury with an almost incredible sum of money,—just now so exceedingly necessary,—it was not in the heart of the thoughtless and heartless king to say No, to the wishes of his favorite minister.

And so the decree is written. In a moment of gushing friendship for the man who had so long ministered to his passions, the king gave Haman his signet ring with which to sign and seal the infamous decree, while also in a spasm of prodigality he waived the offer of the treasure. We shall make a great mistake, however, if we suppose that Haman was not wise enough to see to it that that money did nevertheless actually go into the king's treasure-house. But nevertheless it was not to the king's advantage. That money was bad money. It was the price of blood. And money put against life carries with it evermore a curse, under the weight of which neither men nor nations can stand. They who barter souls for hire will find that hire like the coveted silver in the hands of the traitor. His chief concern, after a few brief hours, was to get rid of the price of blood; and with a despairing cry he threw down the cursed silver upon the temple-floor and fled from its scorching, withering presence. That silver was heavy enough to sink the soul of Judas into the bottomless pit. And Haman's ten thousand talents were a weight that finally sufficed to hurl him from his high place into the depths of obscurity and sorrow. Money against life must bring death.

But, for the present, all goes well in the court of Xerxes. The annalist paints with a few strokes two pictures of vivid and startling power. Two lines are enough to open two windows upon scenes of stirring activity—"The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed."

What contrasted scenes! The sovereign, true to his

convivial nature, and his love of feasting and revelry, must apparently celebrate with a banquet of wine this latest proof of his favorite's interest in his kingdom and welfare. And so the two infamous men, king and courtier, to relieve themselves of the cares of state,—having sent the royal messengers all through the empire with the bloody decree,—went into the banqueting-house to have a glorious debauch! The king and Haman sat down to drink.

But another and very different scene is to be witnessed outside the palace. The tidings of woe pass rapidly throughout the realms of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces. And in the capital there is universal perplexity and distress. It may be that there were more Jewish people there than in other cities. They would naturally gather around their beloved queen. And we may well believe that all men of whatever nationality would be troubled by the publication of such a decree. There was no public explanation of the cause of this terrible blow. The people were possibly ignorant of the exact extent of the impending calamity. They may have felt,—and well might they have felt,—insecure themselves; and lived in daily terror lest the blow now hanging over their Hebrew neighbors might soon descend upon their own heads also. They were sorely perplexed. They were the sport of a capricious despot. They knew not but that even now the royal caprice was singling them out for the same kind of slaughter. And besides this, no thoughtful man could look forward less than a twelvemonth, and contemplate with any composure the coming destruction of all neighborly and

commercial relations, when every man's hand should be turned against his neighbor's; for all could not but see that the Jews would fight for their lives; and the whole city and land would be deluged with blood. No wonder the city Shushan was perplexed!

But what did it signify to those two wicked men? The king was the weaker-minded of the two. His chief desire was to have a good time. Haman's head was clearer; and his plans, though diabolical, had so far been even more successful than he could have expected. He is therefore also prepared to have a good time. In the flowing bowl the drunken villains sitting on the high places of power drown the troubled noises that come up to them in the palace from a saddened and perplexed people. It was naught to the proud prime minister that the sword of the executioner might now leap up and strike down the queen from the side of her husband, as well as the rival in the king's gate.

But his vaulting ambition, in this respect, overleaped itself. It was the very extent of the blow that he had planned that brought the missile at last down upon his own head. Had he been content to have accomplished the ruin of Mordecai, he might easily have put him out of the way. The cruelties of a selfish ambition, in his case as in all others, defeated its own grasping and malignant end, and brought upon itself the punishment which it so richly deserved. The ambition that seeks only the advancement of self, and which in gaining its object cruelly and remorselessly overrides the interests of every one else, is simply hurrying to its own over-

throw. It plunges into the ruin which it merits, and hastens to commit the guiltiest suicide.

But we must not overlook the fact that there is running through this story of Esther a brighter and far more comforting lesson than those so far considered. We have here suggestively illustrated the subject of,

III.—Providential Interventions in Human Affairs.

It is a notable fact that the name of God is not found in the book of Esther. The fact has naturally enough given rise to many curious speculations touching the purpose of the writer in thus omitting all reference to the Divine Being, who presides over all history and who inspired his pen to put on record this narrative so strikingly illustrative of the ways and workings of Divine Providence. It is useless to follow these speculations. It is enough to say that this absence of the Divine name can be no objection to the inspiration of the book, seeing no book of the sacred canon shows more plainly the hand of God. The holy name may not be written in the chronicle; but everywhere between the lines appear the plainest tokens of its presence and its power.

We see for one thing, Divine Providence here *superintending human affairs*. The God of the book of Esther is not a God afar off, and indifferent to the course of events among men. He is near at hand, quick to hear and prompt to help and mighty to save His people. The chronicle reveals as in a glass the complicated network of evil passions, the scheming of wicked men, their plots and counter-plots, the grinding oppressions of the poor,

the revelries of the rich, the aggrandizement of the great, the prayers and tears and cries of the distressed. We recognize it as a section out of life. Men, nations, and events are here just as we see them in actual life.

And yet just as plainly we see God here overruling all events, and causing them to issue according to His sovereign pleasure. His all-wise and supreme counsel is here displaying its power, defeating the schemes of the wicked, and bringing richest blessings upon the heads of the righteous. As Haman rises to power, and begins to disclose the cruelties of his ambition, the Providence of God brings Esther to the throne, to checkmate the diabolical schemes of the royal favorite. Mordecai's faith rightly interpreted the reason of her advancement. He stirs the soul of his royal kinswoman to duty by the lofty prophecy,—"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" God's hand was in it all; and His power still maintained supreme control over all the plans of men, and the course of events; even though in name and manifest presence He seemed to be afar off.

We see here also many illustrations of that *timing of events*, which is ever one of the most marked characteristics of the ways of Divine Providence. It was surely a more than human power that moved the wicked Haman to appoint a far distant day as the day of slaughter of the Jewish people. The whole matter had been put into his hand; and he might have fixed upon an early period for the extermination of his enemies. And we should have supposed that he would want to get rid of them as soon as possible. But we see him

fixing upon a time that would give abundant opportunity to thwart his nefarious designs. Only in the lapse of time could those counsels have been overthrown: and God led him to afford that time; and so all his schemes came to naught. The same favorable timing of events may be seen in the day of Esther's unbidden entrance into the royal presence. For thirty days she had not been sent for. She justly might have thought the time unpropitious for an uncommanded appearance before the capricious monarch. But it was Divinely ordered that she should come before the king just when he was inclined to be gracious, and when the golden sceptre should be held out to her.

Yet again, we can not fail to see a superhuman power guiding the various threads of human affairs in the matter of Mordecai's reward. He had saved the king's life; but his fidelity seemed to go for long unnoticed and unrewarded. What power was it that hindered the king's sleep, on that particular night after Haman's boasting before his family of his greatness, and after the construction of the gallows on which he was about to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged? What power led the king to desire the book of the records of the chronicles of his kingdom to be brought and read before him? Who inclined the reader to turn to the story of Mordecai's faithful deliverance of the king from the machinations of his enemies? What power brought Haman just at this juncture into the court of the palace? It was an unseemly hour to visit the king. But Haman was so full of the thought of condign vengeance upon the obnoxious Mordecai, that he was willing to test even the

strength of the king's love for him by venturing, not only unbidden, but also at an unseasonable hour, to approach his master. How plainly we see here wicked men led by their own interests, and under the sway of their own desires, and yet just as certainly led by a power higher and mightier than their own in a way in which, had they known all, they would never have chosen to go of their own will?

Marvellous are the ways of Divine Providence! Like the pattern in the loom, a casual glance reveals only an inextricable confusion. Superhuman forces seem to mingle with human passions; and there is no order or certainty in the issue, and no pleasure in the present outlook. Yet to a closer eye it is evident that an Infinite Power has in His hands all the threads of life; and He will bring them not only to the result which He purposes, but also in just the time He chooses. When the complicated web of human affairs is finished, all plans of men and all events of life shall be found to fit with perfect accuracy and a matchless beauty.

Once more, the story of Esther brings before us many significant illustrations of *the retributions of Divine Providence.* The blow fell upon Haman just when he was in the height of his power. It was his endeavor to reach up and gain a loftier place, that led to his completer downfall. He was like the wicked men of whom the Psalmist speaks when he says,—"I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride com-

passeth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" And it was all a mystery to the Psalmist. He continues,—"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors!" This was the end of Haman.

The honors, which he felt sure were intended for himself, were given to his rival: and he was himself made the instrument of exalting the hated Jew before all the people of the capital. His wife rightly interpreted this as an omen of his destruction. He was now on the downward slope; and he went swiftly to the bottom. The very blunders which he committed, in the agony of his desire to escape the impending doom through the mercy of the queen, now only hasten his overwhelming ruin. The very gallows which in the day of his pride and power he had prepared for Mordecai the Jew, now serve as the instrument of vengeance upon himself. "His mischief returns upon his own head; and his violent dealing comes down upon his own pate." The

king had loved him and showered upon him the highest honors; but will now show him no mercy: "because he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart." The retributions of Divine Providence in this oriental history develop slowly; but when the blows begin to fall, they come fast and heavy,—to the utter destruction of the wicked.

That same watchful Providence brings at last abundant reward to Jehovah's faithful and believing servants. To Esther on the throne, and to Mordecai the Jew in the king's gate, and to the people of Israel throughout all the vast empire, there comes at last a day of rejoicing. The Providence of God turns their adversity into prosperity, and in wondrous and unexpected ways brings good out of all their evil. There was a day in the life of Jacob when he was constrained to cry out,—"All these things are against me." But when Divine Providence had gathered up the scattered and tangled threads of his life, he had abundant reason to reverse his judgment; for his long and varied experience enabled him to see that all things had really been in his favor,—"working together for his good." It was so with Mordecai. At one time also in his life it seemed as if God had forsaken him; and all evil powers were about to prevail against him. But even then the most untoward events, under the hand of a gracious God, were shaping themselves for his honor and happiness.

And thus shall it ever be. "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

XII.

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.

THE work of pulling down is usually neither hard nor long; but that of building up is both. This trite truth finds a pertinent illustration in the overthrow and the re-establishment of the Hebrew State. After a long period of decay only did the work of demolition begin. But when once entered upon, it took the king of Babylon less than five years to break down the monarchy in Jerusalem. After the predetermined seventy years the process of reconstruction began. And more than one hundred years were consumed in building again the Hebrew Commonwealth. It took a century to restore what a half decade had sufficed to destroy.

This suggestive fact will clearly appear from a glance at this period of Israel's history. The Captivity began B.C. 605.* The appointed seventy years, therefore, expired B.C. 535: and this was the date of the first decree, which was issued by Cyrus, for the rebuilding of the house of

* The careful student will not need to be told that all these dates are only approximately correct. Great uncertainty still exists as to the exact chronology of this period. The text follows the judgment of the most approved interpreters: and the years mentioned are probably not far wrong.

the Lord at Jerusalem. The second decree for rebuilding the temple, issued by Darius, was fifteen years later, viz., B.C. 520. This was the period of those four remarkable men,—Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, and Zechariah,—who laid the foundations of the Restoration. From their day we must pass onward almost seventy-five years before we come to the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra went up to Jerusalem B.C. 457: and Nehemiah did not receive his commission from the king of Persia until thirteen years later, viz., B.C. 444. The work of these two men occupied more than twenty-five years; so that fully one hundred years elapsed before the Jewish State was once more rehabilitated.

A great work, then, had been done in Jerusalem before Ezra and Nehemiah appear on the stage. It is especially noteworthy that the first concern of the exiles from Babylon, under the influence of their leaders and the prophets of the Restoration, was to rebuild the "house of the Lord." And this, notwithstanding many hindrances, they had actually accomplished. But in the course of half a century succeeding the completion of this work, many disorders had crept in; and the national as well as the religious life of the people was at a low ebb. The ways of Zion mourned: and an apathy, insensible alike to the claims of God and the love of country, had settled down upon the people.

At this juncture Ezra and Nehemiah appear in the history. The former goes up to Jerusalem thirteen years before the latter; and is armed with a commission from Artaxerxes relating for the most part to religious affairs. The work set before him Ezra vigorously under-

took, and in it was measurably successful. But it soon became apparent that religion could not flourish without some change in the civil status. In the providence of God, Nehemiah is now commissioned from the king in matters chiefly civil and secular. His work was necessary in order that the work of his companion and predecessor might not altogether prove a failure.

The two men were admirably fitted to accomplish their respective tasks. Ezra belonged to the priestly family, being a lineal descendant of Aaron. "He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given." He had also made special preparation for his life's work in the line of his special aptitudes. The significant record is, "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Nehemiah probably belonged to the tribe of Judah. He was as devoted to the service of Jehovah as the "ready scribe." His position in the court of Artaxerxes had to do with secular matters, and brought him into close contact with his sovereign. He was the king's cup-bearer. When therefore he had won the favor of his master, and desired his help, he was commissioned to go up to Jerusalem to perform a royal rather than a priestly work. The tidings which came to him from the city and sepulchres of his fathers, had emphasized the defenceless condition of Jerusalem,—her wall being broken down and her gates being burnt with fire. To rebuild this wall, to set up those gates, and to re-establish civil order was the work for which Nehemiah was commissioned.

These are the two men chosen of God to finish the work of re-establishing the Hebrew nationality. God had prepared their way before them. We can hardly doubt that the benign influence of Esther and Mordecai, who flourished in the preceding reign, still lingered in the court of Persia, and inclined the son of Xerxes to show extraordinary favors to such worthy representatives of favored Israel. The God of Israel thus prepared the way of His servants, as before He had prepared them for the work which they were to accomplish. Ezra's profound knowledge of the law of the Lord,—the earnest preparation of his heart that it might become imbued with its inner life and spirit,—the subjection of his will and conscience to the requirements of that law, so that his life was an illuminating commentary on its holy precepts,—his strong desire to teach in Israel the statutes and judgments of Jehovah,—his aptitude in understanding that law, giving the sense, and causing the people to understand the reading of it;—all this is manifest from the brief record. And all this came from the Lord, who was now opening the path for his feet.

The same Divine Power had prepared Nehemiah for his life's work. "For pure and disinterested patriotism he stands unrivalled. The man whom the account of the misery and ruin of his native country, and the perils with which his countrymen were beset, prompted to leave his splendid banishment, and a post of wealth, power, and influence, in the first court in the world, that he might share and alleviate the sorrows of his native land, must have been pre-eminently a patriot. Every

act of his during his government bespeaks one who had no selfishness in his nature. All he did was noble, generous, high-minded, courageous, and to the highest degree upright. But to stern integrity he added great humility and kindness, and a princely hospitality. As a statesman he combined forethought, prudence, and sagacity in counsel, with vigor, promptitude, and decision in action. In dealing with the enemies of his country he was wary, penetrating, and bold. In directing the internal economy of the State, he took a comprehensive view of the real welfare of the people, and adopted the measures best calculated to promote it. In dealing whether with friend or foe, he was utterly free from favor or fear, conspicuous for the simplicity with which he aimed at doing what was right, without respect of persons. But in nothing was he more remarkable than for his piety, and the singleness of eye with which he walked before God. He seems to have undertaken everything in dependence upon God, with prayer for His blessing and guidance, and to have sought his reward only from God." *

But we need not at present characterize these eminent servants of God any further. Their distinguishing traits of character will become better known to us as we ponder the story of their work in finishing the rebuilding of Zion. They were

The Model Builders.

The just and pre-eminent right of Ezra and Nehemiah to this title will be evident from a brief study of the

* Smith's Bible Dictionary, *sub voce,* Nehemiah.

work which they accomplished, the methods, wise and efficient, in which they wrought, the great difficulties which they encountered, and the efficacious helps which they received.

I.—Their Work.

It was a vast and complicated business that lay before these last leaders of the Restoration. It is true the work had been wisely begun and faithfully prosecuted by their noble predecessors. But now that work had fallen into decay; and, as is often the case, so here, it was more difficult to renew an old and crumbling edifice than to build anew upon an altogether different foundation. This was the work before Nehemiah and Ezra. It devolved upon them to see just what was needed in a period of obscure and complex difficulties, to reduce the confusion to order, and to work faithfully, steadily, and perseveringly to the one great end of restoring to its ancient glory and power the city of their fathers. And all this they did. Two features of that work stand forth with unusual prominence, and call for our attentive study.

The first was the building of the wall. Nehemiah's first survey of ruined Jerusalem was equally picturesque and pathetic. In the night-time, and by moonlight it must have been, the noble governor, just arrived from the court of Artaxerxes, rode all over the ruined heaps and broken walls of the holy city. That night view of Jerusalem only confirmed the previous experience of his faithful co-worker. Ezra had sought to arrest the deteriorating process by the reform and purification of the social life of the people. To this end he had insist-

ed upon all who were so entangled putting away their strange wives, which they had taken from the people of the land. But it did not take many years to establish the fact that, so long as the returned exiles were allowed unrestricted intercourse with their heathen neighbors, it would be impossible to maintain the purity which all true friends of the Restoration desired. The building of the wall, therefore, was a prime necessity. There must be first created a center and home, and as well an exemplar, for the reviving life of the nation. "The one step which could resuscitate the nation, preserve the Mosaic institutions, and lay the foundation of future independence, was the restoration of the city walls. Jerusalem being once more secure from the attacks of the marauding heathen, civil government would become possible; the spirit of the people, and their attachment to the ancient capital of the monarchy, would revive; the priests and Levites would be encouraged to come into residence; the tithes and first fruits and other stores would be safe, and Judah, if not actually independent, would preserve the essentials of national and religious life." *

In this first great necessity that confronted the builders of the Restoration, we have an early instance of that which finds more than one illustration in our modern life,—the civil status has much to do with the life and progress of religion. True religion can not be enforced by the civil power; and it does not need *such* help to advancement. But, while Christianity is independent

* Smith, *ut supra.*

of government, it can not be safely neglected by government. It is saying the least, and yet saying much, to claim the same right of protection, by the civil power, of our holy religion, and the conservation of its peculiar institutions, without which it can not exist, that is unhesitatingly accorded to the business in which a man may engage, and to the property which his industry may accumulate. It is on this ground that we may boldly demand of the civil power the conservation of our church property, the purity of the family, and the quiet of the Sabbath. For these are essential elements to the nourishing of the life, and to the forwarding of the growth of the true religion. They are the walls around Jerusalem, without which religion must certainly languish and ultimately perish.

The second feature of this work was their building for the future. It was a work of pre-eminent faith to run that wall around the ruins of Jerusalem. The exiles were few in number; and but a small portion of them could be induced to settle down among the dust-heaps of the city. Indeed, the desolations of the capital could be only measurably covered over by the allotment of one in ten of the exiles to reside within the walls. But the future would change all this. The ancient capital would renew her ancient renown, and become again the diadem of beauty for the whole land. And it was to the honor of Nehemiah's faith that it could look beyond the present destruction to the coming days of abounding life and power. He built, therefore, upon a broad foundation. Far more extensive was his work than the most sanguine expectations could have

believed necessary for the demands of his own time. He wrought for coming generations.

Like his was the work of his companion. In matters less distinctively secular Ezra wrought also for the future. As truly as his co-laborer the "ready scribe" would do a thorough work. These noble men were laying the foundations of a new commonwealth. They were of one mind as to the elements necessary to the abiding of the structure which they were building. So, while Nehemiah sought the re-establishment of civil order, Ezra emphasized, in public teaching and private life, the supreme importance of devotion to God and rectitude among men. To this end he wrought. No outward walls nor material palaces would ever give stability to the new order of things, without something more. They were but the body. That body must be informed and animated by the living spirit, or it would speedily come to ruin. It was the work of Ezra, in a pre-eminent degree, to put into the external form, which the genius of Nehemiah had created, the living spirit of a holy life. And in this he was assisted by the governor and many of the leading exiles from Babylon, who wrought hand in hand with him.

Thus these two men sought to accomplish the noble end for which they had been commissioned from the court of Persia, and far more from the court of Heaven. For five hundred years their work remained: and it was no fault of theirs that, in the lapse of the centuries, the living spirit at last forsook the noble form that had been fashioned by their tireless hands. Their work was on a grand scale, and for a future age. And they

built the new State with every element of strength and beauty.

This will appear more clearly, as we consider,

II.—Their Methods.

The manner in which Ezra and Nehemiah sought to fulfil their mission was as notable as the end they finally attained. Their plans were commensurate with their work. The wise, far-sighted, and systematic arrangements which they made for building up the new commonwealth, disclose their own ideal of the structure which they sought to rear, and stand as prophecies and promises of the grand consummation. This is manifest, whether we consider the plans of Nehemiah or the methods of his companion and fellow-laborer.

1. In the great work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem it is not difficult to trace the master hand of the governor in a number of suggestive particulars. First, it was his plan that it should be emphatically a work of the people. His own immediate followers shared his moonlit view of the ruins of the Holy City. Then before the priests, nobles, and rulers he portrayed the distress of the ancient capital, and so encouraged them with his story of the king's favor, that with one mind they said, "Let us rise up and build." "So they strengthened their hands for this good work." And all united in building up the wall. The priests and Levites,—hereditary leaders of the people in all that pertained to the welfare of the chosen race,—led off in the work. Even Eliashib, the half-hearted high-priest, entangled as he was in an unholy alliance with the enemies of Nehemiah, could not

stand against the unanimity and enthusiasm of the builders on the wall. But the leaders were not left to do the entire work. Every man and every household had a part in the good cause. And even the women could not be debarred from doing something in this that seemed more distinctively man's work. The daughters of Shallum (Neh. iii. 12) are mentioned among the builders of the wall, doubtless only as representatives of many other noble women who shared in the great undertaking. And all such have an honorable place in history as most efficient friends of truth and righteousness, from the women who wrought for the furnishing of the tabernacle to those who labored with Paul for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Secondly, it was a part of Nehemiah's plan that they should build "every one over against his house." Two valuable ends were thus attained,—the comfort of the builders and the thoroughness of the work. As even that horse works best that works with the least chafing of the harness, so the builders of the wall wrought most efficiently because their work was near by, and no expenditure of force was necessary to bring them in contact with it. Each one also was stimulated to the utmost, both in the character and measure of his labor. No one of the builders could endure that his part of the wall should be less advanced than his neighbor's, or inferior in the character of its workmanship to that with which it was connected. The master-workman thus secured from all his subordinates the best possible results whether in character or amount.

Thirdly, it was also in the governor's plan that every

man's work should join on to that of his neighbor. It was thus deeply impressed upon the workmen that their labor was relative as well as personal. They were building a wall, not a collection of unconnected towers. The need of co-operation, mutual concession and constant consultation, and friendly regard for what others were doing, would therefore become more and more evident. Under this wise plan of Nehemiah, therefore, much more was done than the erection of a wall. While they were building themselves in from all untoward influences from without, they were also strengthening the bonds of fraternal and neighborly feeling, and thus creating a compact and living organization within the henceforth impregnable capital.

Fourthly, it belonged to the governor's plan that every man should work with fitting instruments. Knowing the dangers by which they were beset it was Nehemiah's care that the builders should be warriors too, as ready to swing the battle-axe as the stone-mason's hammer,—prepared to draw the sword as quickly as the trowel. So they wrought in the toilsome but glorious work, girt alike with the weapons of war and the tools of peace, "from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared."

2. Turning now to the more spiritual work, which was accomplished largely under the influence of Ezra, we shall find equal occasion to admire the wisdom of the methods adopted by these model builders. It was their unfailing care to seek to deepen the religious life of the people. This appears in the very beginning of their labors in the efforts which Ezra put forth to secure the purity of the social order, and which were wrought out before Ne-

hemiah had received his commission from the king to rebuild the wall. See Ezra, chapters 9 and 10. The same important end was sought after, in the rebuke which Nehemiah administered to the rich among the exiles, because of their oppression of the poor. See Nehemiah, chapter 5. True religion, in the days of the Restoration, as in all time, was to "do justly, and love mercy," as well as to "walk humbly with God." The governor therefore opened the way for great spiritual mercies to the new commonwealth, by taking up the stumbling-blocks, and so preparing the way of the Lord.

This crowning blessing came at last in the great revival, which occurred in Jerusalem in connection with the observance of the feast of Tabernacles. See Nehemiah, chapters 8, 9, and 10. The wall was now finished; and the Jews were safe alike from the attacks and seductions of their enemies. The worship of the temple was now re-established in something like its pristine order. The season of comparative leisure in the circuit of the year had now arrived. The Divinely appointed period for the reading of the law had now come; which, according to the Mosaic institutes, was to be done every year at the feast of tabernacles. It was a great occasion. The leaders embraced the opportunity afforded by a wise Providence, in the use of the regular services of the ceremonial system, which yet, because but now reinstated, were unusually thronged, to bring the law of God to bear upon the consciences of the people.

For more than three weeks there was such an assembly in the Holy City as even Jerusalem had seldom witnessed. In point of numbers that throng had doubtless

often been surpassed; but for spiritual power it may be doubted whether it was ever exceeded save by Pentecost. On the first day of the seventh month Ezra began to read the law. The tenth day of this seventh month was the day of atonement; and on the fourteenth began the feast of Tabernacles, which the returned exiles, with a more scrupulous regard to the ritual, kept as indeed a feast of booths. On the twenty-fourth day of this same month we find the multitude still waiting upon the God of their fathers.

The usual threefold result of such seasons of spiritual quickening followed. There was great mourning over sin, and humble confession of it before God. There was great joy and gladness in the Divine service; and the "joy of the Lord was the strength" of His people. And last of all, there was the solemn dedication of the people to God. "The children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sack-clothes and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshiped the Lord their God." It was a great day of spiritual visitation in Israel. It set the seal and crown of Divine favor upon the methods of the Model Builders for deepening the foundations and rearing the abiding walls of the new Commonwealth.

But the noble end was not easily attained, as we shall readily believe when we consider,

III.—Their Difficulties.

Every work of value must be tested. In physical things this is done when the work is finished,—as when the steamer is sent out upon a trial trip, or the railroad bridge is put to the utmost strain before it is opened for travel. But in the spiritual realm this work of testing goes on *pari passu* with the work itself. Thus Christian character is at once built up and confirmed. It was just so with the work of the Model Builders. It was tried and tested by the difficulties which it encountered. These difficulties were of two kinds.

1. Those arising from internal weakness. The number of the exiles, at the utmost, was comparatively small. It is a notable fact that less than fifty thousand of the children of Israel returned from the captivity; while the nation that went up out of bondage numbered not less than three millions. Compared, then, with the work before them, the returned exiles were but "a feeble folk." They seemed to be altogether inadequate to the accomplishment of their mission. But they were weaker yet in the apathy which marked the conduct of some who ought to have stood in the front rank. The nobles of Tekoa "put not their necks to the work of the Lord." It was not the first time the men of power and station had proved unreliable. Jeremiah himself had met with disappointment in the same direction. He says, "I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them: for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds." As in these Gospel

times, so in the days of the Restoration, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called." God does His work with feeble instruments. But they were far weaker by reason of the moral obliquity of many, and among them some who should have been the leaders of the people in uprightness of life and purity of heart. The case of Eliashib, the high-priest, is probably only one of many illustrations. He, and they like him, had almost unconsciously drifted to a low plane of pure living, because of their forbidden alliances with their heathen neighbors. These ungodly connections, indeed, were not only the result, but also the origin of this low spiritual living.

2. There were difficulties in their way also, arising from external opposition. The enemy outside was untiring in his efforts to thwart the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Three methods of attack were resorted to, that seem but pictures of the ever-present opposition to the work of the Lord. The first was *ridicule*. In the beginning of the work of wall-building this method of obstructing it was adopted. They said, "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." This is pre-eminently the opposition which weak things must expect to encounter. The young Christian especially will have to confront this form of opposition. And it is a powerful weapon too; before which the strong often go down.

This method of assault failing the enemies of Nehemiah and his companions, they now try the efficacy of *intrigue*. They can not stop the work of building, which still goes rapidly forward. So now they would help it

along! They would share in the good work! Therefore they invite a conference, that they may establish a basis for mutual help in carrying on that work. How like the tactics of the great adversary of the Lord's cause! As soon as Satan sees he can not hinder a good work, he professes a great desire to assist in advancing it, purposing all the time to destroy it. The Model Builders were wise enough to know that all parleying with the enemy was dangerous; and Nehemiah would none of it. He says, "I am doing a great work, so that I can not come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" This method of intrigue, therefore, as their former efforts of the same kind in the court of Persia, met with signal failure.

Once more, they try the efficacy of another line of assault,—that is, the *corruption* of the chosen people. This they do, partly in the absence of the noble men who finish the re-establishment of Jerusalem, by giving strangers a place even in the sacred precincts of the temple. Afterward, even in the presence, and under the administration, of Nehemiah they would break down the sanctity of the Sabbath; and so cause the wrath of the Lord to come upon the congregation of Israel. This had well-nigh succeeded but for the untiring vigilance of the faithful governor. And this is ever the last, and always most subtle, and successful, method of hindering the rebuilding of Jerusalem. A pure and holy Church is invincible against any and all opposition. It is only when she becomes corrupt that she becomes also weak, for then the Lord in anger forsakes Jerusalem, and withdraws those gracious spiritual influences with

which He evermore is wont to sustain His people. These influences were given in abundant measure to the builders of the Restoration. Of this we shall be convinced when we have considered,

IV.—Their Helps.

In the face of all opposition, and notwithstanding many trials, the great work of re-establishing the Hebrew State went slowly but surely forward. Like the onflowing of a mighty river, obstacles retarded, but they could not arrest the movement. The opposing shores were strong enough to create some feeble eddies, indeed, and to set in motion some short and transient counter-currents; but the great central flood moved on without a pause and with an irresistible power. There is a threefold explanation of this fact.

1. Their efficient leadership had much to do with it. Our study of the life and times of Ezra and Nehemiah has been to little purpose, if it has not convinced us that these were chosen men, pre-eminently qualified to achieve the success which crowned their life's work. Wise beyond their generation, they were just the men to finish the superstructure of a revived national life, with indissoluble bands joining on their work to that of their illustrious predecessors. Men of faithful spirit, they steadily held the awakening conscience of the new nation to the requirements of God's holy law, and so built with the most indestructible materials in restoring Zion. They were men of the firmest convictions, and nothing could swerve them a hair's breadth from the path of right; but they were also eminently conciliatory in disposition and indissolubly bound together in the spirit

of unity. They were peculiarly well fitted to work together; and while the one restored the civil order and governed in secular affairs, the other led in spiritual matters and taught the people, with loving faithfulness, the knowledge of the Lord.

But leaders, of the largest mould, can not do everything.

2. The people also were enthusiastic in their determination to rebuild their ancient glory. The rapid progress of the wall-building and the marvellously quick accomplishment of that part of the great undertaking are explained by the significant words of Nehemiah, "So built we the wall; . . . . *for the people had a mind to work.*" With confidence in those who went before them, and encouraged by the hope of success, the great body of the people were both of one mind, and full of enthusiasm. Before such a state of things, the opposition which met them from without, and the indifference of a few confronting them from within, were of no avail in preventing the accomplishment of the work. And thus it shall ever be. No hindrances can ever be effectual against the spirit of unity and enthusiasm, wisely led, and in the advancement of a noble cause.

But the builders of the Restoration had other help, mightier far than these, the origin and inspiration of all others.

3. They were under the constraining influences of the Holy Spirit. The return of the exiles from Babylon was a great national movement, under a Divine impulse such as nations rarely receive. The briefest comparison of the Exodus and the Restoration must start some sug-

gestive thoughts. When Israel came up out of Egypt, it was in the midst of marvellous displays of Divine power. In the presence of Jehovah's outstretched arm and manifested power, we can not wonder that the heart of the whole people went with the God of their fathers, now revealing Himself as never before in the progress of the ages. The mystery is that they did not follow Jehovah with a more perfect devotion, with an abandon of consecration as unusual as were the exhibitions of a superhuman power, and the evidences of a Divine Presence.

But in the return from the captivity there were no such indications of the presence and might of Jehovah. Miracles there were none, whether of judgment on Israel's enemies, or of protection and mercy to the favored people. And yet the exiles went up from Babylon as truly guided and protected by a heavenly power, as the nation of slaves from the bondage in Egypt. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing. He can work with mighty power among the multitude without revealing the methods of His grace. The omnipotent Spirit it was, we must believe, that put it into the hearts of the rulers to be favorable to the chosen and afflicted people. It was He who inclined the captives to surrender the homes of their building in the land of the stranger, that they might go up to the city and sepulchres of their fathers, and build up there new homes within the long-forsaken but ever-loved Jerusalem. The Spirit of the Lord rested on the exiles.

And that Spirit just as plainly presided over the whole work of restoring the desolations of Zion. He gave the captives their noble leaders, running through an illus-

trious century illuminated by their great characters and grand achievements. He inspired them with that spirit of harmony and co-working so essential in the day of their weakness, and through which they were able to accomplish such a gigantic undertaking. And it was the Divine Spirit who made His power and grace so signally manifest in the great awakening of the people at the memorable feast of tabernacles. It was His wise and holy providence that brought the multitudes together. His convicting power carried the truth, as read from the law of God by Ezra and his companions, home to their consciences. It was His constraining power that humbled them before their God because of their manifold and long-continued sins. And it was His gracious influences that guided their hearts to purpose, and their lives to render, a consecrated service to the God who redeemed them from the land and trials of the captivity, and gave them once more a place among the nations.

Thus with Divine and human forces were the Model Builders helped in the accomplishment of their life's work. Thus wisely were they guided and assisted in their methods of labor in renewing the glories of Jerusalem. Thus also before their unwavering faith and changeless fidelity all difficulties vanished: and to them it was given to see once more renewed the vision of the Psalmist, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King." Once more they could say, as David said, "God is known in her palaces for a refuge."

With this holy end attained at last, the mission of the Builders of the Restoration was ended.

XIII.

PETER AND JOHN.

PETER and John stand next to Paul, in the relative importance of their position and influence in the New Testament Church. They were the most noted, and perhaps most gifted of the Twelve. Their intercourse with their Master was of the most frequent and familiar character. Before their call to be disciples, they were acquainted with each other, and were associates in the same occupation. They were both fishermen of Galilee, with their homes on the lake-shore.

They were together in most of the solemn and critical periods, not only of their own earlier spiritual history, but also of the Lord's ministry. Together they witnessed His miracles and heard His instructions. Together they were eye-witnesses of His majesty in the holy mount. Together, weary and sorrowful, they were with Him in Gethsemane. Together, and alone of the Twelve, they stood with Him in the high-priest's house. Together they ran to the sepulchre to confirm the tidings of their Redeemer's resurrection. Together they entered the Temple, healing the believing cripple at the Beautiful Gate. Together they stood before the Coun-

cil, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Him, who had suffered and died for them.

So intimate were these two disciples. And yet they were very unlike. The characteristics of Peter's nature are well known. It is not necessary to dwell upon them here. It is enough to say that they were largely due to an impulsive temperament, and a perfect honesty of expression. John's character is far more generally misunderstood. In Da Vinci's great painting of the Last Supper, he is represented as apparently the youngest of the Apostles. This may have been true. The artist has also given him a softness and delicacy of expression that is far more womanly than manly. This indeed is the common conception of the "beloved disciple." In the judgment of many, the feminine element predominates in the character of John the Evangelist. That this is a mistaken judgment, a more careful examination of the various incidents of his life would make abundantly apparent. We can not enter upon such an examination here, however, as another theme claims our attention. It must suffice to say that the ancient conception of John seems much more accurate. The primitive Fathers speak of him under the symbol of the eagle, which, with unfaltering pinion and unclouded eye, soars majestically to the sun. Strength as well as beauty marks John's character.

Without entering into any fatiguing and barren detail of the incidents in which Peter and John appear together in the history, let us give attention to some general principles which are especially emphasized by the contrast of their lives and characters. We have here an illustration of

I.—The varying rapidity of Development in the Christian Life.

Though bound together in the mysterious affinities of true friendship, the religious life of these two disciples developed in an unequal pace. Peter is so impulsive and contradictory, and his life is so full of haltings and drawbacks, that we are under a constant temptation to discount his knowledge of Divine truth and his experience of Gospel grace. But we ought not to forget that, even during our Lord's earthly ministry, Peter stands in the front rank of the Apostolic company, in the clearness of his conception of our Saviour's character and mission. In a time of general uncertainty and questioning as to our Lord, it is Peter who first starts up with his noble and ringing confession,—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." In a time of searching and unpalatable preaching, and of widespread defection from the Saviour's standard, it is Peter who answers the Lord's inquiry, "Will ye also go away?" with the passionate and loving asseveration, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!"

In like manner, after the Lord's earthly sojourn was ended, it was Peter who is God's mouth-piece to the multitude at Pentecost. Accompanying his preaching the Holy Ghost descends with quickening and saving power upon the waiting people. It is Peter, also, who receives the Lord's commission to open the doors of the Christian Church to the Gentile world; and this commission he fulfilled in the ministrations of the Centurion's house. We do not believe in the Primacy of Peter. Neither are we compelled to accept this dogma of the Papacy, in order to account for the fact that, in

knowledge and experience of Divine things, Peter's character and life exhibit a more rapid development than is to be seen among his brethren.

Nothing, indeed, is plainer to the student of Apostolic history, than that Peter, Paul, and John come forward, in succession, as the great leaders of the infant Church. And they appear in this order. In the opening chapters of the Acts, for example, Peter is the prominent figure. Then he sinks out of view; and Paul takes his place as the central figure in the chronicle. Except for the first third of the way, Luke's history is substantially a record of the travels and labors of the Apostle Paul. Last of all,—after Peter and Paul are gone to heaven,—John stands up the last of the Apostolic company, to defend the Church against new enemies,—to guide her through new perplexities,—and to leave the completed canon of Holy Scripture, a precious legacy to the people of God in every age.

So far as Peter and John are concerned, we can see an eminent fitness in this arrangement. It answered the varying maturity of their powers. Quicker in movement, in their earlier years, Peter made the most rapid advancement. His temperament, and temptations, and falls were themselves powerful elements of progress,—under the careful guidance of Him who suffered no temptation to utterly overwhelm Him, and no fall to totally destroy Him. But John, moving more slowly than Peter, matures at last more profoundly and grandly than his fellow-disciple. We have an instinctive feeling, that, for writing the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse, a pen of peculiar power and of special training was need-

ed. That pen was found in the hand of the "disciple whom Jesus loved."

Similar differences in the development of Christian life and character is manifest in the church of every age. We see it in our day and among us. Under the same ministry, and, so far as we can observe, under substantially the same spiritual influences in every other respect, we see believers growing toward the same perfect standard, indeed, but with widely varying degrees of progress. In many cases it may be impossible to account for the difference. In some instances, we see how all heavenly and human agencies conspire together to carry the soul rapidly forward; and, on the other hand, how sinful and even Satanic influences combine to hinder the process of gracious development. But whether explicable to human wisdom or not, the fact of such differences we are constrained to recognize.

The germ of heavenly grace must be planted in the heart. In this one particular all true disciples must be alike. We are also justly expected to water it, and to cultivate it with unfailing care. But no one has warranted us to look for its budding and unfolding at certain specified times, and with certain unvarying phenomena. Such a course of things, in nature, would reduce the boundless variety of spring-time to a cast-iron rigidness and sameness that would be intolerable. In neither case does the great Author of life repeat Himself. The development, in both the natural and spiritual worlds, is in the direction of certain great typal characteristics: but, in the details, there is an endless variety — a profusion that is boundless.

We need to bear this fact in mind constantly, and especially in our relations to young Christians. If we do not, we shall be in danger of committing a mistake in one or other of two opposite directions. We shall stimulate into an unnatural forwardness some of the plants of grace whose growth ought to be retarded; or we shall neglect, if indeed we do not uproot, others of a slower growth,—whose ultimate maturing is assured, but for whom the season needs to be prolonged. There are still some Peters who need the training which the Master gave to Simon—the training of repression and restraint. There still are Johns who demand a more patient waiting—the quiet shade, the calm, clear sunlight, and the fructifying shower—and they will yet develop into the noblest believers, possessed of a richer experience, and a profounder knowledge of the Lord, upon whose bosom they have learned to rest.

Again, we have here an illustration of

II.—The Force of Natural Temperament as an Element in any proper estimate of the Christian Character.

We all take to Peter. He seems the most thoroughly human of all the Apostles. His religious experience is more like ours than any of his brethren. Especially do we find in it a counterpart of ours, in that duality of experience which the Apostle Paul so well describes in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and which so often perplexes us;—"those opposite phases of character that present themselves, according as effect is given to the promptings of the old nature or the new.' His spiritual insight, enlightenment, and fervor

must have been very great, when he called Christ the Son of the living God: but how great must have been his blindness, when, immediately after, he rebuked his Lord for talking of His approaching death! Again, it was a daring faith that led him to attempt to walk on the water to go to Jesus: but how weak was his confidence in the face of the boisterous waves! So, also, at the Last Supper his heart was glowing with the ardency of his love for the Lord,—for whom he was ready to suffer and to die; but after the Supper, how stupid and sleepy, that he could not watch with his Lord even one short hour! He was bold and valiant on the arrival of the traitor; but how cowardly beneath the scrutiny of a maiden's eye and the question of a servant! There seem, indeed, to be two Peters in the sacred narrative. And herein we feel that he and we are on common ground. We are conscious of this double nature ourselves. If we are Christians, we find "a law in our members warring against the law of our mind." It is, perhaps because the character of Peter displays this twofold feature more than the others do, that we are so much interested in it.

If now we inquire why this dual nature is so apparent in Peter's life, we shall come upon the ground of the principle just now under illustration. It was owing largely to his natural temperament. "His was a quick and rapid nature, his thoughts and emotions starting at once into full impetuous activity, like a deer startled from its hiding-place; while the honesty and outspokenness of his nature constrained him to give expression to such thoughts and emotions just as they came. Conse-

quently, in Peter you commonly have not that result of the composition of forces, natural and gracious, that you generally have in the actions of a believing man,— not the blending of the natural and the spiritual,— the combination of both in one modified result. You rather find each element coming out by itself."*

If Peter was right, therefore, he was right all over. If he was wrong, his was no half-hearted wrongness. He gave all his energies to his position, whether right or wrong. Governed too frequently by impulse, he was often led astray. Rash in utterance and hasty in action, his words and deeds often brought him to humiliation, and called him through the deep waters of a penitence as true-hearted as had been his hasty conduct.

For all this, we should make a great mistake in underrating the reality and depth of Peter's religious character. Appearances are often against him; but through all he impresses us with the conviction that he truly loves, and would faithfully serve, his Lord. We reach this judgment, because all but unconsciously we make allowance for the force of his naturally impulsive spirit and headstrong temperament. We have no such feeling about John. If John should sin, as Peter does, we should feel that he had fallen beyond recovery. With something of Peter's fiery zeal, justifying the title which the Lord gave to him and his brother,— Boanerges,— John possessed a far more evenly-balanced nature. Temptations that would overwhelm Peter, would scarcely touch John.

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* Dr. W. G. Blaikie in *The Sunday Magazine*, May, 1869, p. 468.

Peter has many followers. They have his temperament. They are people of a hasty spirit. They are constantly giving utterance to words of which they are ashamed, and doing deeds for which they receive a mortifying return in penitential grief. They are the prey of a thousand temptations. Their lives present to the superficial observer a curious conglomerate of the natural and the spiritual,—of the old Adam and the new. But a more careful examination of such characters will reveal the existence of the principles of grace in strong and active exercise,—overborne sometimes by the naturally impulsive spirit, but rising ever above all opposition and triumphing over every difficulty. Wisely, and perhaps at times even unconsciously, we judge the Peters, not indeed by a different standard, but in a different spirit, from that which marks our measure of the Johns. We recognize their constant exposure to greater temptations. We feel that they need more grace to make anything like the same attainments in the Christian life that are reached by their more evenly-tempered brethren. We expect to meet in their experience greater inequalities. If at times Peter does not rise higher than John, we look at other times to see him fall lower. But we believe that the grace of God, which avails for the one, will ultimately bring about the salvation of the other also.

Yet again, in these contrasted lives of Peter and John, we have an illustration of the fact that,

III.—Christian Laborers are adapted to different Fields of Christian Effort.

A casual glance at these two Apostles, as we have seen, might leave the impression that they were not very unlike. Their occupations were the same. They had something of the same spirit, as appears in more than one incident of the Gospel history. Their firm and close personal friendship shows that they must have possessed some elements of character in common. But, as the history advances, and their respective characteristics are more clearly unfolded, we see that we have had but a surface view of these two natures. They are really very dissimilar; and yet not in any such way as to hinder either their most intimate friendship or their most harmonious co-working. In the later periods especially, of the New Testament record, we see that Peter's is an essentially bold and active and aggressive spirit, while John's is of a quiet and contemplative cast, moulded for a life of retirement.

And their fields of labor and influence, in the primitive church, answer to these differing characteristics. It is a noteworthy fact that John, who was apparently the most prominent of the Apostles at the time of Christ's death, and who certainly was nearest and dearest to his Lord, very soon after the scenes of Pentecost disappears from the history. For a quarter of a century he is hardly known in the chronicle of those stirring times. The reason is not difficult to discover. John's nature did not fit him for mingling in the tumults and commotions consequent upon the preaching of the Gos-

pel and the spread of the rising religion. He was engaged in but few controversies with his unbelieving countrymen. He made no missionary journeys to other lands and peoples. These were the works of Peter and Paul.

For this kind of work,—active and aggressive,—they were naturally adapted and specially endowed. John was not. His want of fitness for this department of Christian activity was not owing to any want of definiteness of belief, or of decision in the expression of his opinion. In these respects he was not behind the very chiefest of the Apostles. The deficiency, if it may be called such, lay in his natural disposition. It was not of an active and demonstrative character. So, in the time of stirring events, John seems to retire to the rear. We are in danger, it is true, of inferring too much from the silences of the record. John may have led as active a life, and accomplished as much, in the way of aggressive and missionary work, as his brethren,—work of which the Holy Spirit, for some wise reason, has not thought fit to give us any information. This may be so. But, when we consider what John was in the Apostolic group during all our Lord's earthly ministry, and for a brief period after His ascension, and then note how completely his labors are passed over in the Apostolic history, we can hardly resist the conviction that it was not very probable that John was engaged in any such work as occupied the time and energies of Peter and Paul. And yet he was doing his Master's will. His quiet life, and contemplative nature, and devotional spirit were fitting him pre-eminently for writing the profoundest

Gospel history, and for receiving and transmitting to the Church the latest revelation of her Redeemer's will. No more important work was allotted to any of the Apostles; and for it none was better qualified than John.

In the facts and inferences above stated, there is a lesson for many in the modern church. We are under a constant temptation to forget the fact, that there are diversities of natural as well as spiritual gifts. We would make the brotherhood of disciples all Peters, or all Johns, according as we ourselves possess the characteristics of the one or the other. And we should make bad work of it, and spoil both. The grace of God in conversion does not change these natural faculties and constitutional traits. It modifies them perhaps; but it does not subvert them. It does not make the retiring spirit bold and aggressive; nor does it give to the stirring soul the contemplativeness of a recluse.

You have therefore no right to censure your Christian friend because he does not work after your methods and in your fields, if he be doing the Lord's work in a way more in accordance with his own Divinely given temperament and aptitudes. It may be your duty to mingle in the commotions of life; while your quieter brother as truly serves your Lord and his, in a more congenial sphere—more congenial, that is, to him. It may be your place to join the army of Joshua, in fighting Amalek in the vale of Rephidim. Just as truly may it be his place to sit on the mountain summit, and there uphold the arms of the interceding Moses. He slings no battle-axe as you do; and yet, as truly as you, has he a right to re-

joice in the discomfiture of the common enemy. The victory, in which both triumph, is gained as much by the praying company as by the fighting host.

This, it will be observed, is a putting of the matter as in some sort a plea for John. It is designedly so; because in our day of Peter-like activity and bustling zeal, the less stirring brother is in danger of being shoved aside. We would not have the Church of Christ wholly the one or the other. It will be a sorrowful day for her when she loses Peter's aggressiveness. Nor will it be less a calamity when John's profounder conception and more delicate and thorough appreciation of the Lord disappears from Zion. It is not necessary that the Peters should become the Johns; or the Johns the Peters; or that both should lose their individuality, coalescing in something different from either. The most important thing is, that we each do faithfully and well the work of the field to which we are specially adapted, without censure or uncharitable judgment of others who do the same. The "Lord of the Harvest," who sends forth the laborers, will make it His care that there is always at work a proper proportion of Peters and Johns. The Great Commander of the sacramental host will always see to it that there are enough soldiers like Peter to press on the column; while at the same time He provides others, like John, who in quieter life and slower movement shall remain to deepen the lines, and make sure the fruits of victory in a solid and lasting peace.

XIV.

MARTHA AND MARY.

THE village of Bethany lies on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. To the traveller approaching it for the first time from Jerusalem, the view is disappointing. He climbs the western face of the Mount, and stands upon its summit, enraptured with the distant eastern prospect. Beyond the wilderness of Judea, which with frightful ruggedness seems to roll rapidly down to the Jordan, rise "the mountains of Moab, with their seamed and shadowed sides, and the long level of their summits, while far down in the southeastern corner there is a glimmer from the waters of the Dead Sea." But no Bethany greets his expectant eyes in the near view. He descends the mountain side for a little ways, to encounter a small ridge, which, as he believes, hides the village. He reaches the top of this; and the whole eastern face of Olivet descends from his feet: and still there is no Bethany.

A few paces further on, however, he comes upon it suddenly, nestling deep in a little basin of its own, yet not shut in, but lying so within the hollow as to look out upon the valley of the Jordan, with the everlasting hills of Moab beyond. Few travellers have so described

it as to give an adequate conception of its profound seclusion. Less than half an hour's walk from the midst of the great and bustling city, its quietude could not have been greater had it been located in the bosom of the Quarantanian wilderness. No wonder our Lord, in the last troubled days of His life, so often passed from the turmoil and controversy and scoffing of the crowded city to the quiet and rest of this little village.*

This was the town of Martha and Mary. It was in their house that the Saviour found a home, whenever His ministry brought Him to Jerusalem. They appear to have been persons of some note in the village and city. They probably possessed a comfortable temporal maintenance, if indeed they were not wealthy. They did not, so far as we know, accompany our Lord in His journeys, as other women did, ministering unto Him of their substance. But their hearts and hands always gave Him a cordial welcome to their home. And His communion with them was more intimate than with any other family mentioned in the sacred narrative.

The two sisters come prominently before us on three notable occasions. The first is that in which Martha is "cumbered about much serving," while Mary sits "at Jesus' feet, and hears His word." The second is at the grave of Lazarus. The third is at the supper in Bethany, where Martha served, and Mary anointed the Saviour's feet. They appear and disappear, therefore, in the common occurrences of daily and domestic life.

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* See Dr. Hanna's "Two Sisters," in *The Sunday Magazine*, Oct., 1868.

And the study of their respective characters should be not less interesting than instructive. "The Christian life at home" is a theme of vital nearness to all of us. Scriptural examples, therefore, in illustration of its manifestations, trials, and triumphs, have a peculiar attraction to all who, in the unvarnished routine of every-day life, are seeking to honor and serve the Lord to whom they have given themselves.

From the incident recorded by Luke, the impression has become quite general that in these sisters of Bethany we have types and illustrations of the unregenerate and the converted life. Martha is the worldling, Mary is the Christian. That this is a mistake will be evident upon a more careful study of the history, and a more discriminating analysis of the natures and conduct of the two women. They were both disciples of Christ. There is not the slightest evidence that Martha was any less truly and tenderly attached to the Lord Jesus than Mary. Indeed, it was the very strength of her affection for Him that gave rise to that anxiety for which He deems it necessary to administer a gentle rebuke. And soon after, before her brother's sepulchre, she professes her faith in Christ in terms which, for clearness of view and unreservedness of trust, are unsurpassed by that of any of the disciples. In our examination of these contrasted lives, therefore, we proceed upon this basis, viz., that they are both Christian lives. This view, as we shall see, gives rise to a number of suggestive reflections. We have,

I.—The two sides of Christian Character.

This is a thought with which we became familiar in our examination of the preceding pair of these "Companion Characters,"—Peter and John. The thought receives fresh illustration from Martha and Mary, and is especially emphasized in the first scene in which they appear before us. Of the two sisters, Martha is the Peter, and Mary is the John. The one is the stirring and active life; the other is the quiet and contemplative spirit. It is Martha who receives the Lord into her house; and on her rests the burden of providing for Him a suitable entertainment. It is Mary who sits at His feet and hears His word. Martha rejoices to minister to Him in temporal things, Mary to be ministered unto by Him in spiritual things. The one is glad to give, the other to receive. In these two ways, the prominent features of their religious characters manifested themselves. At the same time, both of them equally loved and faithfully trusted in their Lord. Martha's love revealed itself in the service of ministering, while Mary's is made known in the service of hearing the Lord's gracious words.

This difference in the characters of the Bethany Sisters was not temporary nor superficial. It was a radical and permanent difference. We have seen how it was in the course of their every-day life. It took the same direction in the time of sorrow and bereavement. It is the bustling and energetic Martha who goes to meet the long-delaying Saviour, though she goes with weeping and with lamentation. But it is the calm and med-

itative Mary who still sits in the house, overwhelmed with grief. It was not, perhaps, that she loved her brother more than Martha did; but that grief weighs more heavily upon such silent natures. The turbulent flood finds an outlet in the activities of the one; while in the case of the other it frets and chafes all the more against the restraints of quietude.

The same difference of character and disposition appears in the time of gladness, as of gloom. In the last appearance of these sisters, at the feast in Bethany, they testified their joy and gratitude for the recovery of Lazarus, as before their sorrow for his loss, in methods that were in keeping with their different temperaments. Martha is now glad to serve her Lord, while her risen brother sits at meat with Him. But Mary more quietly attests her grateful affection, by breaking the alabaster box, and anointing the feet of her gracious Redeemer. Each woman acts like herself, whenever she appears in the sacred narrative. Divine grace has beautified and ennobled the characteristic traits of each; but it has not obliterated them. That grace did the same, as we have seen, no more, no less, for Peter and for John.

And grace Divine exerts the same influence still. Like the mantle of snow, which whitens and glorifies the mountain and the plain; but does not level the one, nor upheave the other: so does the grace of God enrobe the soul in its own glorious dress; but it does not obliterate the natural characteristics by which it is distinguished from all its fellows. The Johns are not turned into Peters, nor are the Marthas transformed into Marys. There are still, as ever, the two sides of Chris-

tian character—"activity and passivity, direction toward the external and toward the internal, the practical and the more contemplative temper, spontaneity and receptivity, love and faith, unwearied activity and immovable rest." *

These two sides of the Christian character are especially prominent in Martha and Mary. But obviously there are other aspects of the life of faith not less important. Such differences in the inward spirit and the outward life of Christianity as are not incompatible with its fundamental principles, we must recognize; and act also with practical regard to them. A distinguished minister and author thus wisely expresses the thought:—"There is not only room enough within the large enclosures of the church for Peters and Johns and Marthas and Marys—for all kinds and diversities of natural character, spontaneously developing themselves, each in its own peculiar sphere, and after its own peculiar fashion, but it was meant that it should be so. The church is that body of which Jesus is the living Head; and as varied as are the forms, the structures, the offices and uses of the different members of which the human body is composed, so varied in disposition, in development, in acts and habits not only may, but ought, the spiritual membership of Christ to be. It is by this very variety in unity that the whole community of the faithful can alone make up, and be fitly framed into, that one body, the church; and as vain and wrong as it will be for the eye to say to the hand, 'I have no need of thee,' or the

* Lange's Commentary on Luke x. 38–42.

hand to the foot, 'I have no need of thee'; so vain and wrong is it for Christians differently constituted, differently situated, and differently engaged, to look out each askance from his own separate sphere, and to condemn others." *

But, while we carefully refrain from the uncharitable condemnation of others, we are perfectly at liberty to criticise severely, and by so doing, to perfect ourselves. This suggests another reflection, of no small importance, viz.—

II. — Christian Character is specially liable to Damage from the Intensity of an Individual Peculiarity.

Taking these two women as types of two forms or aspects of Christianity, it is plain enough that Martha could not and ought not to have become Mary. But is it not equally plain that her special danger and temptation were to become more of a Martha than she ought to be, or needed to be? Mary's temptation was, perhaps, equally strong in the opposite direction. The mistakes which we make in this matter are manifold; mainly, perhaps, because we are so little given to self-introspection. Some of us seem never to know our weakest point; and, the enemy assailing us there, we are easily overthrown. But more of us never learn where we are strongest, and so never know how to avail ourselves of our might. There are yet others of us who have cultivated the natural bent of our spirits—disposition or temperament—until it has reached ab-

* Dr. Hanna, *ut supra.*

normal proportions. If we are Marthas, our activities must go with the rush and hurry, and sometimes destructiveness of a whirlwind. If we are Marys, our contemplativeness has grown into stagnation and laziness. On either hand, the danger of harm arises from the very excess and intensity of that for which our characters are specially distinguished and separated from those of our brethren.

This was the trouble with Martha. She was wrong, not only in not recognizing that Mary was serving the Lord in the way most accordant with her natural disposition, but also in allowing herself to be carried to an extreme, in the direction of her own natural disposition: And what was true of her, may be true of some of us. "Unquietness, distractedness, and impatience are apt to be generated when this spirit is too largely indulged. Let undue time and thought and care be lavished upon the manifold activities of Christian labor; and there may come an indisposition to, and an incapacity for, that inward calmness, collectedness, composure, quiet waiting, up-turned, up-looking mood of mind and heart so absolutely necessary for all close, continued communion with our Lord, for the reception from Him of those great spiritual blessings that He imparts. For the want of this nothing can compensate. It is the one thing needful for the Christian life." *

It will be observed that this language bears particularly upon the danger of excess in the cherishing and in the exhibition of a Martha spirit. In less common and

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* Dr. Hanna, in the Article *ut supra*.

more isolated instances, there is doubtless just as much danger from the undue prevalence of the Mary spirit. But this is not the special temptation of the great majority of the Christian brotherhood, at least in our days. The church has passed through ages when the general tendency was toward the quietude and contemplativeness of Mary's spirit. In those times, people who aspired to any eminence in the Christian life, sought the monastery and the nunnery. In the seclusion of cloister life, rather than in the care and trouble of many things, they hoped to make the greatest advancement in the life of faith. It is hardly necessary to say that this spirit exhausted itself through its excesses.

We need no warning against any such extreme. We live under a different *régime*. Mary has abdicated the throne; and Martha now sways the sceptre. And we all feel the spirit of the age. No one can be an eminent Christian, in our day, who does not "run" a church, superintend two or three Sabbath-schools, attend all the prayer-meetings for which he can find a vacant hour,—besides giving some attention between times to the business of providing bread and butter for his children, and of paying his honest debts! As this stirring Martha spirit sweeps hurriedly by, some of us, gasping for breath in the commotion, may feel like clutching at her mantle, as it flutters in horizontal lines toward the rear, and pleading with her to hold on a bit; but it is of no use! She is gone in a moment: and our vain cry is borne away, on the wings of the wind, in the opposite direction!

We use the language of exaggeration? One would

hope so: but after all, and in all soberness, is it much exaggerated? Is it not perfectly plain that the stirring, restless, active, careful, and anxious spirit of Martha is the spirit of our time? Are we not careful and troubled about many things? Are we not engrossed with the things that are merely temporal? Well has it been said,—"It is not open sin or flagrant breaches of the Lord's commands alone, which lead men to eternal ruin! It is far more frequently an excessive attention to things in themselves lawful, and the being 'cumbered about much serving!' It seems so right to provide for our own! It seems so proper to attend to the duties of our station! It is just here our danger lies. Our families, our business, our daily callings, our household affairs, our intercourse with society—all these may become snares to our hearts, and may draw us away from God. Profits and pleasures alike are dearly purchased, if, in order to obtain them, we thrust aside eternity from our thoughts, abridge our Bible-reading, become careless hearers of the Gospel, while we become formal, and brief, and cold, in our private communion with God."* The quaint and sprightly Matthew Henry says, "Care is good and duty, but cumber is sin and folly." "Worldly things are then a snare to us, when they hinder us from serving God, and getting good to our souls."

The Christians of our generation need more of the Mary spirit, and perhaps less of the Martha. We need more attention to the inner and spiritual life of the church, and less devotion to its external condition. The

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* Ryle's "Expository Thoughts,"—Luke x. 38–42.

fountain of the Christian life is a "hidden" spring. The pure, pellucid, sparkling stream can be secured and maintained only by attention at the fountain-head. The Christian's strength is in the "secret place." When the incoming wave of worldliness washes through and over that hiding-place, he is undone! We need the intermingling of the Bethany sisters' spirits! In a word, we need more of the imitation of Christ; for in zeal and activity Martha only followed Him; and in her calm and peaceful spirit-communings Mary also resembled the Saviour, whom she loved not more nor less faithfully than her sister Martha. It is only as we guard against excess in either direction that our character shall become most symmetrical.

Still another reflection, suggested by these contrasted characters, is of vast moment; viz.—

III.—The Influence of our Internal State, upon our External Life, is Controlling.

This thought possesses many relations and ramifications which it would be impossible for us now to explore. It will be enough for us to trace it through the two channels indicated in the history.

1. The one line of thought terminates upon Mary. Sitting at the Saviour's feet, conscious of the purity and rectitude of her motives in so serving her Lord, she has nothing to say of her sister's complaint, so unreasonable and unjust. She is not provoked by it into any recriminating charge. She must have been wounded and grieved by her sister's fault-finding; but she leaves her vindication to the Lord, whom she loves, and loves

to hear. Nor is she disappointed. The gracious Master takes up her cause, and defends His trusting disciple.

And this is His method still. There is still a "needs be" about offences. They must come! There are still, as in Paul's time, not only wicked, but "unreasonable men." There still live Marthas, who would have all other people to be Marthas. There are still some Peters, who would run the Johns out of the country! Because you do not serve the Lord as they do, that Lord now hears complaints against you. But you need not be troubled by them. Only see to it that you are faithfully serving Christ, in your sphere, and in accordance with those faculties and aptitudes which He has given you, and that in so doing you run to no extreme;—see you to these things: and the Almighty Saviour will be your advocate against the unreasonable complaints of your brethren. He will Himself plead your cause.

This is the wide field of so many of those uncharitable judgments which the Lord condemns; and we may well dwell upon it a little longer. The Christian mother, of retiring disposition, instinctively seeking the shade and privacy, and with a houseful of children, to be taught and trained in their tender years to love their Lord and hers, finds among them the more than sufficient field for the fullest development and exercise of her special aptitudes and powers. She is not, therefore, found among the more active, public, and aggressive workers in the Lord's cause. And for this she is censured by them, as selfish, indolent, exclusive, or indifferent. And yet is she not doing her Master's work, in the sphere for which she is peculiarly adapted? And if, in response to the

unreasonable calls of her more stirring sisters, she were to abandon it to join in their activities, would not her life be a series of failures and mortifications; from which they themselves would be glad at length to retire her, convinced of what she knew at first, that she had no aptitudes for such a life? And so with a wounded spirit and a sore conscience she returns to the kind of Christian service for which her Lord has peculiarly endowed her, and which she ought never to have forsaken.

In other directions also we meet with these uncharitable judgments. The contemplative recluse can not resist the temptation to remind his more active brother that there is a zeal that is not according to knowledge; and that he may possibly find a Scripture most appropriate to his life and condition in the complaint of the Bride in the Song of Songs,—"They made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." So, too, a Boanerges can not endure the mildness of a Barnabas. In his eyes the world is full of sin, corruption, and wrong. It is no time for words of consolation: and he continually chafes in spirit because his brethren are not all "Sons of thunder." In like manner, that Christian woman who finds her most appropriate and congenial sphere of work at home, is under special temptation to find fault with her more vigorous sister, because she, as seems to her, neglects that part of their Master's work which to her appears both so important and fitting, to do an outside work; which nevertheless it is important should be done, and for which she has so many and such obvious qualifications.

One result of these harsh and unreasonable com-

plaints, is that many of the Lord's true disciples suffer untold anxieties from the vagueness of their views of the limits of their responsibility. This vagueness largely arises from the fact, that, because of the censures of their brethren, they fear to give any proper weight to the character of those peculiar aptitudes and temperaments with which they have been Divinely endowed, as an element in determining the sphere in which the Lord would have them work. Very many, therefore, are so burdened with a sense of sin for the failure to do what is far off, and to them unattainable, and for which they are unfitted by natural bent and temperament, that they fail also to do what lies just at their hand, and in the sphere of their dispositions and aptitudes. It is quite true that the doctrine may be abused to justify going to an extreme, in the direction of either the Mary or the Martha spirit. But it is a sound doctrine nevertheless that these Divinely given tastes, faculties, and dispositions ought to guide us in the selection of the kind of work which we shall do, and feel called to do, for our Lord.

Nor is there any just ground for these uncharitable judgments of which we have been speaking. Let the Marthas know that the Marys are truly serving the Lord, though only sitting at His feet! Let the Johns give the Peters credit for a true devotion to the Redeemer's cause, though they be not wrapt in mystic contemplations, and prefer to live an active, bustling life. And let both the Peters and the Marthas on the one side, and the Marys and the Johns on the other, understand that each needs some infusion of the character of the other,

if they would be most perfectly conformed to the blessed Saviour, loved and served, perhaps, in equal measure by them both.

2. The other line of thought terminates upon Martha. It may be summarized in the single statement, that we shall never bring others any nearer to Christ than we live ourselves. "Careful and troubled about many things," Martha would draw Mary away from Christ. While Mary sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word, her sister said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." But afterward, when, in the time of trouble, Jesus came to them; and she had that blessed interview with Him near the grave of her brother, so comforting to her own heart, this same Martha becomes the nimble messenger of glad tidings to bring her sister Mary to share the presence and consolations of their Lord. With what alacrity does she bear to her sorrowing sister the soul-cheering message, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee!"

The Martha of the one incident differs so much, in spirit and conduct, from the Martha of the other, that we find ourselves almost inclined to wonder whether it can be the same woman in both cases. It is the same Martha: and in the reason for her two opposite courses of action we may find a much-needed lesson for us as to our influence upon our fellow-men. The elder sister was a true Christian, we can not doubt. But so long as her mind was engrossed with temporal cares and pursuits and duties, it was her desire that Mary should be like her. She could not appreciate the blessedness of

her sister's choice and station at her Saviour's feet. So far had she fallen away from the heights of her spiritual privileges, that the utmost of her desire for her sister was that she might be as worldly and as full of care as she was herself. How unworthy of Martha this was, we need not stop to say! But are we not in danger of the same sin?

Our influence upon our companions and neighbors, whether they be fellow-disciples, or still impenitent, will be determined by the same thing,—our own internal condition. If we are living far from God, in a state of spiritual declension, we shall be found exerting a powerful, whether conscious or unconscious, influence upon all with whom we come in contact. If they are the Lord's people, we shall be leading them away from Him, and influencing them to be as cold, formal, and worldly as we are ourselves. And, if they are still unregenerate people, they find comfort for their consciences, not wholly at ease, in the fact that we are so wedded to earthly things, that there is little perceptible difference between ourselves and them.

But Martha was not always "careful and troubled about many things." There came a day when the Lord visited her soul. He had come in the power of a great sorrow. Now He comes in person, and with gracious words draws her very near to Him, and fills her mind with a great peace and joy in believing. How differently Martha acts now! Before, she would have drawn Mary down from the nearest fellowship with the gracious Master. Now, the first impulse of her quickened, revived, and comforted heart is to go and get Mary to

come and share with her in this unspeakable blessing. And so shall we. When we have near and blessed fellowship with our Lord, we shall have both the desire and the power to draw our brethren also to His gracious feet, there to sit and hear His words.

And it is only when we stand by the Saviour's side, that we have any right to invite, or power to persuade, or wisdom to direct sinners to the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." A blind missionary, who was accustomed to visit a House of Refuge, becoming temporarily confused, lost his way, and could not find the gate. A number of children were playing on the green, who with the best intentions called him to go in this way and in that; but only to confuse him still the more. At last, one little fellow, seeing the old man in such perplexity, and unable to lead him, ran to the gate himself, and thence cried out, "Come right to ME." The blind man could follow the sound of the little voice; and so soon came up to the gate, and got safely in. The incident illustrates our duty. It is not enough for us to stand afar off, and cry to the lost and blind, to go here or there. We must run first ourselves to Christ, and thence send out the assuring invitation, "Come right to ME!"

May we not trace this thought a little further in this direction? We can not take others any nearer Christ than we are ourselves. To the parent, and teacher, and minister this is a solemn fact. If therefore we would bring others nearer and nearer to our Saviour, we must be coming nearer and nearer to Him ourselves. But how often we fail just in this particular! To illustrate it

by but one example:—Not seldom is it true that the minister in holy things carries his people on through a vast deal of experimental knowledge of Divine things; and then comes to a stand-still. He proclaims the terrors of the law with all boldness and fulness. His preaching is searching and troubling and awakening. And it is influential. The hearts of his hearers respond to the truth which he proclaims. Throughout the congregation there is an unusual tenderness of spirit, and souls are mourning over sin. They need now to have Christ presented as a full and gracious Saviour, and to be invited to trust in Him for pardon and peace. But this the man of God can not do. He has himself such vague and unworthy conceptions of the power and grace of Christ, that he is not able to bring his people into this blessed experience. He has carried them to Mount Sinai and through the wilderness; but he can not take them over the Jordan and into the land of peace and rest.

Profoundly solemn and true it is:—He who would lead another to Christ must first come to Christ himself; and he who would bring his fellow-man into a richer and deeper experience of Divine things must first for himself enter into the fulness of the grace which he would make known.

XV.

PAUL AND BARNABAS.

IN Paul and Barnabas we come to the last but not least pair of these "Companion Characters." Their names are not found among the original Twelve; but they were none the less Apostles both in spirit and commission. By the appointment of the Lord, in the consecration of the Spirit, and with the prayers of the Church, they were sent forth to minister the tidings of grace to the Gentiles. They were both admirably qualified for their work by their birth, training, and natural characteristics. They were both "Jews of the Dispersion," born and reared, not in the Holy Land, but among them that were "scattered abroad." Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, where he probably possessed some property; for he sold the land, and "brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet." Paul, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, was born to a poorer temporal estate apparently (for he was a tent-maker), but to higher advantages in other respects. By his birth, he obtained the valuable franchises of Roman citizenship. The one, we are told, was a Levite; while the other boasted of his pure descent from the tribe of Benjamin. A similar tribal derivation may be seen in Samuel and Saul. The first

prophet seems to have been of the tribe of Levi (cp. 1 Sam. i. 1, and 1 Chron. vi. 27 and 34); and from "little Benjamin" came forth the first king of Israel. It may not be altogether imagination that finds some trace of Samuel's benignity in Barnabas, and of Saul's impetuosity and fire in him who was also called Paul.

The two men were well fitted to work together. Alike generous and self-sacrificing, their common love to the once lowly Nazarene bound them together as true yoke-fellows in the common work. In the later history Barnabas drops out of sight; and Paul towers, like the royal Saul, so far above his brethren, that we are liable to the temptation of unwittingly underrating the "Son of Consolation." As Jonathan by the side of David, so Barnabas is shaded by his more illustrious companion. We must not forget, however, that in their earlier intercourse, Barnabas was the more prominent. As a matter of fact, indeed, Paul was indebted to Barnabas for some of his own rapid advancement, so far as any human instrumentalities brought it about. This will be sufficiently evident upon examining the first of four scenes, in which these two men appear together in the history, viz.,—

I.—Barnabas Introducing Paul both at Jerusalem and Antioch.

The early Church, as is true of the modern, was slow of heart to believe in the mighty spiritual powers which, in every way, were co-working with her. When the Lord had risen from the dead, in accordance with His often-repeated word, there was none of His disciples who seems to have been expecting it. They were all sur-

prised. It seemed to them an idle tale, and they believed it not. So also, when the angel opened the prison doors for Peter, the praying band could not credit the speedy answer to their supplications. In like manner, when the risen and ascended Saviour laid His strong arm on Saul of Tarsus, there were but few who could trust the report that came to Jerusalem,—"He which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed."

Thus it came about that, when Paul appeared in Jerusalem, all on fire with love to the Lord whom he had persecuted, and sought the fellowship of the Brethren, his advances were rejected. The blaspheming murderer, so lately breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the brotherhood of disciples, now himself a disciple! The news is too good to be true! He is rather a wolf in sheep's clothing! He seeks admission to the fold only the more easily to play havoc with the flock! These were probably their thoughts; and so they turned a cold shoulder on the new convert. They barred the door against the suspected disciple, and would have none of him.

Paul was in a perplexing strait. He was already accursed by his kindred according to the flesh; and those who were now his kindred in the higher relationships of the spirit, refused to own him as a member of the family! What can he do? Is there no one among the believers who has faith enough to give credence to his story of converting grace; and, recognizing in him the lineaments of a true disciple, has grace enough to put aside his prejudices, and receive a brother whom the Lord

himself receives? Is there no one here to befriend the friendless?

Yes; there is one: and that is Barnabas. We have no evidence that he knew Paul before his conversion. We can not, therefore, attribute his magnanimous conduct to such previous acquaintance and friendship. It was a higher motive that influenced the "Son of Consolation." While others were saying, as was said of the earlier Benjamite, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" he had compassion on the outcast stranger. He took him to his heart and love. No Divine message came to him, in visions of the night, as to Ananias, to tell him Paul was heaven's chosen vessel. He seems to have found that out himself. His spiritual instincts recognized in Paul a brother. Paul's story of redeeming love, like genuine coin, carried in itself its own best evidence. And such was the spiritual insight of Barnabas (for, as the sacred penman says, "He was a good man, full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost"), that he felt the force of the testimony. Despite all outward probabilities, he bowed before its power. And, convinced himself that Paul was truly converted, he generously befriended him, and by his influence gained for him a fitting place among the company of the faithful in Jerusalem. He "took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

This was a generous thing for Barnabas to do; and it throws a flood of light upon his natural character and spiritual attainments. There are but few, even in our

day, who, at the peril of their own good standing, labor quietly to remove unwarranted suspicions from a fellow-disciple. There are fewer still, gifted with such insight of spiritual things, as to be able to pierce the unfavorable surface appearance, and to detect the underlying presence of real grace in the heart. This did Barnabas. They are truly "Sons of Consolation" who follow in his footsteps. They may not, indeed, be permitted to advance another Paul; but their course shall nevertheless speak for the peace and happiness of Zion. "Next only to the man who achieves the greatest and most blessed deeds is he who, perhaps himself wholly incapable of such high work, is yet the first to help and encourage the genius of others. We often do more good by our sympathy than by our labors, and render to the world a more lasting service by absence of jealousy, and recognition of merit, than we could ever render by the straining efforts of personal ambition." *

At Antioch also, Barnabas opened the way for Paul. The Church had outgrown the national boundaries of the people among whom it had been first established. At Antioch the Gospel mightily prevailed. Tidings of this wonderful success soon came to the parent church in Jerusalem. Barnabas was commissioned to visit the scenes of such marvellous triumphs. His was a most important duty. Antioch, a great commercial emporium, was now thoroughly and wonderfully stirred by the new religion. It did not take Barnabas long to discover that here was a field already opened up for the working

* Farrar's "Life and Work of St. Paul," Vol. I., page 238.

of a master mind. There was just one man to fill the place. That man was Paul. And Barnabas started to find him. He found him in his native Tarsus, whither persecution had driven him; and he brought him to Antioch.

Here, again, Barnabas shows his magnanimity. He bore himself the commission of the Church of Jerusalem. He was not destitute of qualifications for fulfilling it with credit and fidelity. The great field was open to him. His own great and immediate and honorable advancement seemed assured. But he thought of the work, and then of Paul. "Barnabas instinctively perceived that a fresher point of view, a clearer insight, a wider culture, a more complete immunity from prejudices were needed for so large and delicate a task. Himself a Grecian, and now called upon to minister not only to Grecians, but to Greeks, he longed for the aid of one who would maintain the cause of truth and liberality with superior ability and more unflinching conviction."* He knew that Paul possessed eminent qualifications for the field; and so without any delay he went for him. In doing this, Barnabas could hardly have been blind to the probability that Paul would speedily overshadow him,—and that from the first he must himself descend to the second place.

But this thought was nothing to him. The great idea in his mind was not the place of Barnabas in the Church, but the work before that Church, and the best way most speedily and thoroughly to accomplish it. His was not

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* Farrar, *ut supra*, page 287.

the spirit of those who have no heart for any enterprise unless they have the first place. Others, not he, might say,

"Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven."

He was content with even the lowest place, if only the great work might prosper, and the name of Jesus be more speedily known among the nations of the earth.

"Thus twice over, did Barnabas save Saul for the work of Christianity. To his self-effacing nobleness is due the honor of recognizing, before they had yet been revealed to others, the fiery vigor, the indomitable energy, the splendid courage, the illuminated and illuminating intellect, which were destined to spend themselves in the high endeavor to ennoble and evangelize the world."* He had unfeignedly rejoiced in the success which had attended the preaching of the Gospel before he came to Antioch. Now, for twelve months, he will rejoice also in the faithful and successful ministrations of Saul of Tarsus; while side by side he labors with him in the fellowship of the Gospel. It was the beginning of a long and faithful co-working in the grandest of all ministries.

This brings us to another passage in these Apostolic lives, viz.,—

II.—The First Missionary Journey.

Antioch was the fitting point of departure for the missionary work. It was there first that the Church seemed to realize her world-wide mission. There she

* Farrar, *ut supra*, page 288.

began to break out of her Jewish shell. The city was both a great center and thoroughfare of commerce. She stood second only to Corinth among the commercial cities of that age. Natives of every country and clime crowded her streets, and trafficked in her markets. The astonishing success of the Gospel, outside the Jewish population, set the Church to thinking and praying. They said to one another,—This Gospel of the kingdom, breaking over national barriers, has come to us; and, if to us, why not to all the Gentiles? With the same influences operating among them, on a more limited scale, that we see at work among us, and which ought to make us the grandest missionary nation in the world, they were not satisfied with the shallow plea, so often urged in our day, "God is bringing the heathen to our own door; let us first seek the conversion of those who throng our streets and crowd our marts." They were oppressed with the burden of the nations beyond. Many of the Antioch Christians, perhaps, were from those outlying nations. The thought that troubled them, we may well believe, was something like this,—We have been gathered from every land, to receive the glad tidings of great joy. Would they not be glad tidings to the peoples from whom we have come? And have we no mission to bear the offer of life to them that are ready to perish? Freely we have received, shall we not freely give?

Such considerations as these drove the Church of that busy metropolis to fasting and prayer. It was while they were so engaged, seeking to compass the elements of the mighty problem before them, that the Holy Spirit

said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The demand was one to try the faith of the Church. In effect it was this,—The work at home is unfinished; and it is great and urgent: nevertheless solemnly ordain to the work of foreign missions your choicest spirits. But the Church had grace to obey. And Paul and Barnabas began that blessed ministration of mercy to the Gentile world which is still emphatically the great and pressing work of the Church of Christ.

The primitive missionaries sailed immediately to Cyprus, the native place of Barnabas; and thence they passed into the regions of Asia Minor, adjacent to Cilicia, the province of Paul's nativity. This fact is very suggestive; and it by no means conflicts with what has just been said. They followed the example of the demoniac of Gadara, who, following the Lord's direction, went home to his friends, to "tell them what great things the Lord had done for him, and had had compassion upon him." Indeed, they followed, too, the direction of their Master, who commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel among all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem." To begin at home, and thence to spread abroad the tidings of grace, is the Divine order in propagating the Gospel. This was the method followed by Paul and Barnabas. And in this they deserve a more general imitation. There can be no censure of the Church that she begins the work at home. She is justly blamed for confining it there. The example of the early Church says in unmistakable words, 'Wait not for the thorough subjugation of the country behind you. Keep

always and faithfully the best troops in the vanguard of the great march.' And this example is presented to us as the direct teaching of the Holy Ghost. Happy the Church that hears His voice.

It was during this missionary journey that the incident occurred, referred to in a preceding discourse, as illustrating one great feature of God's method of spreading and maintaining the true religion,—by sending His servants two and two. It was at Lystra, in Lycaonia, that Paul and Barnabas came in contact with paganism, in a conflict so parallel with the struggle of Moses and Aaron with Jannes and Jambres in the court of Pharaoh. The reference to the contest here is of value for its incidental testimony to the different traits of character of Paul and Barnabas. The heathen called the latter Jupiter—the very name unwittingly revealing the benignity of his nature, and, in general, the large and grand scale on which the character of Barnabas was formed. But Paul they called Mercury, because he was the chief speaker. Of bodily presence weak, but in mental structure keen, nimble, wiry, logical, and cogent, he was a powerful reasoner, and mightily convinced his hearers that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-expected Messiah. We would not willingly lose the light which this occurrence throws upon the natural disposition and temperament of these first missionaries. It confirms our impression of the fitness of their association in the common but novel work.

But they did not always work together. And with this remark we come to another scene in the lives of Paul and Barnabas. That is,

III.—Their Quarrel about Mark, and their Separation.

Another illustration of the fact that Christians oftenest come short where they seem strongest, these men now sin in that of which they had given so striking an example,—the co-working of Christian friendship. They disagreed, not upon any fundamental principle of their labors, but, as is too often the case, upon a minor matter,—that of the person who should attend and assist them in their second missionary tour. It was no good-natured and mutually forbearing disagreement. They both came to a war of words, and seem to have lost their tempers, both of them. "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other." Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus: but Paul chose Silas and went again through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

If we desire to find out who was to blame in this quarrel, we shall not have a difficult task. Canon Farrar puts the case, for the most part, justly, in these words: —"We are not careful to apportion between them the sad measure of blame, or to dwell on the weaknesses which marred the perfection of men who have left the legacy of bright examples to all the world. In the mere matter of judgment each was partly right, each partly wrong; their error lay in the persistency which did not admit of mutual accommodation. Each was like himself. St. Barnabas may have suffered himself too strongly to be influenced by partiality for a relative; St. Paul by the memory of personal indignation. Barnabas may have erred on the side of leniency; Paul on the side of

sternness. St. Paul's was so far the worst fault, yet the very fault may have risen from his loftier ideal. There was a "severe earnestness" about him, a sort of intense whole-heartedness, which could make no allowance whatever for one who, at the very point at which dangers began to thicken, deserted the great and sacred work. Mark had put his hand to the plough, and had looked back; and, conscious of the serious hindrance which would arise from a second defection, conscious of the lofty qualities which were essential to any one who was honored with such Divine responsibilities, St. Paul might have fairly argued that a cause must not be risked out of tenderness for a person. Barnabas, on the other hand, might have urged that it was most unlikely that one who was now willing to face the work again, should again voluntarily abandon it, and he might fairly have asked whether one failure was to stamp a lifetime. Both persisted, and both suffered. Paul went his way, and many a time, in the stormy and agitated days which followed, must he have sorely missed, amid the provoking of all men and the strife of tongues, the repose and generosity which breathed through the life and character of the Son of Exhortation. Barnabas went his way, and, dissevered from the grandeur and vehemence of Paul, passed into comparative obscurity, in which, so far from sharing the immortal gratitude which embalms the memory of his colleague, his name is never heard again, except in the isolated allusions of the letters of his friend." *

* "Life and Work of St. Paul," Vol. I., page 450.

There is no reason to doubt, then, that in the spirit of the quarrel both the Apostles were at fault. But, in every other respect, Paul seems to have been in the right. Barnabas desired to take Mark with them; and, had there been no objection to him, that desire would have been as proper as it was natural. For Mark was his own sister's son. But in this case, Barnabas seems to have permitted the feelings of natural affection to blind his spiritual judgment. His is one of the earliest instances in Ecclesiastical History of that "Nepotism" which has so often cursed both Church and State. A person in official station may indeed put forward, to subordinate places of trust, members of his own family, provided they possess the necessary qualifications. But the good of the service is the paramount consideration. The advancement of relatives must always be subordinated to the general good. And few men are good judges of the abilities of their relatives; and are, therefore, especially liable to the mistake of Barnabas. A wise man will not constitute himself a judge in any such a case, but will defer to the judgment of others.

These remarks, it is true, are applicable to the civil service of the country; but they are none the less true, for all that. And they have a far more extensive application. There have been sons of ministers, as indeed of men in other walks of life, urged by their parents into the sacred office, who, by all natural abilities and aptitudes, could better have served the Lord by measuring tape, or even breaking stones. We must earnestly desire that our sons may serve the Lord in the work of the holy ministry, and we are to earnestly pray that the Lord

would "thrust them forth into the harvest"; but we must let the Lord do the "thrusting," and not ourselves.

Paul was right in not wanting Mark. His eye was more single than that of his friend. It was not upon the man, but the good of the cause. Mark had started with them in the first journey; but turned back, as they were going away from the home of his relatives, and were about to enter upon the most difficult part of the work. He thus showed that, at that time at least, he was deficient in the spirit of self-denial and devotion, which were essential to a true missionary. This seems to have been the judgment of the Church at Antioch. Barnabas and Mark went off to their native island in a pet, and we hear no more of their evangelistic labors. But Paul and Silas, with the benediction of the Church, went forth upon the missionary journey which culminated in opening another continent to the triumphs of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God.

The quarrel, therefore, at first apparently so disastrous to the missionary cause, was Divinely overruled to increase the number of missionary laborers. This result is by no means uncommon. The great Head of the Church has committed her interests to weak and fallible men. But He still maintains control Himself; and of their very weaknesses, foibles, blunders, quarrels, and sins, He will build up the elements of her greatest strength. The quarrel was made a means of good, even to Mark, the cause of it. Paul afterward speaks of him as "profitable to him for the ministry." And we know that he wrote one of the most charming and graphic of the Gospel narratives. Nor did the quarrel cause any per-

manent estrangement between Paul and Barnabas. Paul ever accorded to the "Son of Consolation" a high place among the servants and saints of God. In his account of what may have been their last meeting, he gives the most decisive, though incidental testimony to the worth of his early companion's character. Paul was glad to remember what was peculiarly noble and Christ-like in the firm, fast friend of his own opening ministry.

This brings us to the final scene* in the lives of "our beloved Barnabas and Paul," viz.—

IV.—The Dissimulation, and the Rebuke.

The occurrence thus characterized took place in Antioch. Peter and Paul were the principal participants in the controversy. But Barnabas also was involved in it—how, will soon appear. The first great trouble in the primitive Church grew out of the persistent narrow-mindedness of some of the Jewish believers. In becoming Christians, they could not forget that they had been Jews. This indeed was natural, and in itself was not wrong. But what was right for them, they persisted in making a law also for the government of their Gentile brethren. Slowly they conceded the right of other nations to share in the blessings of the Gospel. Long after this right had been all but universally acknowl-

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* It is a question whether this incident in the Church at Antioch did not occur before the quarrel about Mark. But as no principle is involved, it has not been thought necessary to discuss it, or to reverse the above arrangement of the topics.

See Farrar's "Life and Work of St. Paul," Vol. I., Chapter XXIII. See also Smith's Bible Dictionary, Article "Paul."

edged, some still clung to the principle that the Gentiles might become Christians only by first becoming Jews. They must therefore be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. And even after this question had been settled by the Council of Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, in opposition to the "Judaizers," there were many who could not rise to the high plane of Christian intercourse implied in the deliverance of the Council—that all converts to Christianity, whether "Jews or Gentiles, were to bear and forbear and meet together as equals in all religious and social gatherings." This class were chiefly from the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. The Apostles —certainly Peter, Paul, and Barnabas—did not belong to this class. They had all entered into the fulness of the charity of the Gospel.

When, therefore, Peter came down to Antioch, he neither felt nor manifested any scruples about maintaining the most loving and fraternal intercourse with the Christian converts from among the Gentiles. This was only doing what was right and essential to the unity and growth of the Church. But in the course of time, certain Christian Jews, of the stricter sort, came down from Jerusalem. We can not say that they were on any unfriendly errand. But Peter, overcome again by that cowardly spirit which had led him into the denial of his Lord and Master, feared to offend them. He knew that "however much they might tolerate the non-observance of the law by the Gentiles, they would look with suspicion—perhaps almost with horror—on any Jew who repudiated obligations which, for *him* at any rate, they regarded as stringent and sacred." He therefore broke

away from the loving fellowship which up to this time he had maintained with the Gentile Brethren, and became as exclusive as the most exclusive who had come "from James." Peter's influence was of course very great among his kindred according to the flesh; and many of them were led into the same inconsistent and unbrotherly position. And the Apostle Paul, who gives us the history of the matter, says that even "Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation."

These words afford a striking testimony to the nobleness of the character of Barnabas. To the single eye of the Apostle Paul, it was an evidence of the depth and wide-spread nature of this new danger to the Church, that even his beloved friend, who, before all others, had manifested so wise, prudent, conciliatory, and catholic a spirit, should now, not only connive at, but actually join in such dissimulation!

The motive which actuated Barnabas was probably an unwillingness to give offence, a desire to please, and to keep all things smooth while the Judaizing brethren remained in Antioch. He did not, nor did Peter, see that true peace can never be permanently secured by the sacrifice of principle. Alas! how many even in our day are in like manner blind, and act in the same inconsistent way. With them it is an all-important matter to have peace in the Church—to keep things smooth. The motive is more creditable to their charity than to their judgment: and it is a false charity too. And it is usually as unavailing as it is sinful. It is a thousand times better for a Church to keep to the truth, and to do the right, than to have things smooth. The air that 's

still is sometimes pestilential. Quiet waters are often stagnant and malarious.

So Paul thought. And, at the risk of alienating not only Peter, but also his true and faithful and earliest friend, Barnabas, he was for settling the trouble on Christian principles. "To eat with the Gentiles, to live as do the Gentiles, was for a Jew either right or wrong. Interpreted in the light of those truths which lay at the very bases of the Gospel, it was right; and if the Church was to be one and indivisible, the agreement that the Gentiles were not to put on the yoke of Mosaism seemed to imply that they were not to lose status by declining to do so. But to shilly-shally on the matter, to act in one way to-day and in a different way to-morrow, to let the question of friendly intercourse depend on the presence or absence of people who were supposed to represent the stern personality of James, could not under *any* circumstances be right. It was monstrous that the uncircumcised Gentile convert was at one time to be treated as a brother, and at another to be shunned as though he were a Pariah." *

With an uncompromising courage, therefore, Paul withstood the dissemblers face to face. In some public assembly of the Church of Antioch, he bravely rebuked the vacillating Peter before them all. Speaking the truth in love, he settled forever the firm foundations of the Christian intercourse of believers of every name and nation. Paul was eminently successful in his arduous task. The crisis passed. The progress of the incipient

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* Farrar, *ut supra*, page 441.

division was stayed. The Church was saved. She now entered upon a new era of loving and brotherly devotion to the great work of scattering the tidings of salvation to the ends of the earth.

With this happy consummation thus at length attained, and with these missionary Apostles friends again as in the beginning, we may now take our leave of Paul and Barnabas. Blessed in their common hope and work; instructive examples of mutual adaptations to their labors, and, after painful experiences, to each other; and happy in the undying memory of their great and true success; fittingly—as in the sacred story—they finish the list of these "Companion Characters."

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